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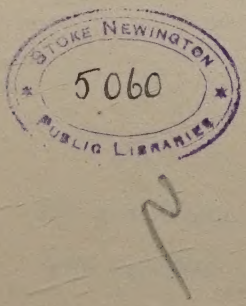

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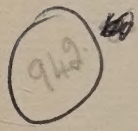

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To

Lily and Arturo

Bim and Pino

and

all the other Gair Wilkinson Marionettes

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BEFORE THE CURTAIN

HOW I wish I could live like that!

Here is a remark which has been uttered a great many times upon my being discovered wandering about with my little puppet theatre and lightweight camp.

It has been made so often as to become remarkable, and I can visualise a long and varied line of personalities who have expressed this desire to run away from a straitened town life to the more natural freedom of a wandering and romantic life in the open air.

It is a further cause for wonderment that of all these aspirants to run wild so few should find or make the opportunity to do so, and yet, it would be difficult to say how, when, where, or why so shy a person as myself should have been thrust into this vagabond way of life, into so noticeable and odd an occupation as a wandering puppet-showman. Personally, I blame the puppets.

There has existed all through the Ages an extraordinary idea that puppets are inanimate creatures controlled by human beings; but after spending some years behind the scenes in manipulating the strings of marionettes I am well assured that the position is quite the reverse, and that a puppet-showman is entirely at the mercy of his figures.

These creatures of wood and paint, these lifeless marionettes, have often made me appear gay when I was really sad; they have made me stand up and pull their strings when I would rather have sat down at my ease. Through my mouth they have caused me to speak the most frivolous thoughts, and to sing songs when really I am no singer at all. They have twisted my face into all sorts of expressions so that I should speak to oblige them, like an old man, as a young girl, as a drunken braggadocio, as fifty different characters. They have made me bark like a dog and "moo" like a cow. To please them I have pinched my nose between finger and thumb and emitted a horrid snarl, drumming the while upon my throat, in order to counterfeit a tune upon the bagpipes. For ten years they have taken me out of my solemn self; they have probed deeply into the subconscious and revealed an embarrassing number of submerged beings.

And then, finally, I was seized by that gay old villain, Punch. He suddenly insisted that I should become a wandering Punch and Judy man, and so persuasive was he that I began to see a charming career opening out before me.

The Punch and Judy show adopted me in all its simplicity. I was to push it about on two perambulator wheels as travelling showmen pushed it about years ago. Together with the show I was to carry a lightweight camp so that I could live simply on the pennies I collected for performing.

The idea was to wander about the country exhibiting the show in villages and in the market-places of country towns, and to camp in my little tent like a

gipsy, on commons, in woods or meadows, or by the roadside as occasion offered.

In this way I hoped to live a healthy, outdoor life, and a life full of changing interest. I hoped to detach myself from this gruesome commercialism, this ridiculous race for fortunes, this vulgar materialism which is filling the world with "things" instead of ideas, surrounding us with greasy engines and raucous noises instead of Divine Thoughts and Songs of Praise.

Root-ti-ti-toot! This was altogether an excellent idea of Mr. Punch's, and I accepted his intriguing profession with enthusiasm and joy!

And yet there were those who were exasperated by this decision, who wanted to shake me and bring me back to earth; who advised me to be sensible, to learn shorthand and typewriting, commercial book-keeping, and wireless, with a language or two thrown in, and so earn my living in a respectable manner.

But if there is one thing more than another which appeals to me about a Punch and Judy show it is its respectability. It is the oldest form of dramatic art; its pedigree is traceable for thousands of years, and all through the ages distinguished men have paid their homage to Punch and his family. In recent years real professors have bent their knitted brows upon the subject; these dignified and learned men have actually managed to look upon the face of Mr. Punch with the utmost seriousness, and they have written histories of him.

From these histories I gather that Punch and Judy shows have been in existence all the world over for

all time. It is Professor Pichel who traces the source of puppets and puppet-plays to the old wonderland of India, where, thousands of years ago before the advent of the human theatre, puppet-plays were the only medium of dramatic art. I gather that these Indian puppet-plays were long and serious affairs; but, all the same, the Professor assures us that in them there was always a worldly old rogue corresponding to our Punch.

Further, he launches the delightful idea, well supported by facts, that the ancient gipsies were puppet-showmen and that is why it is we find puppet-shows in Thibet, and Burma, and all over India; in China and Japan, in Persia, Turkey, Italy, High Germany and Spain. The Greeks, Romans, and the Egyptians had their puppet-shows, and surely, what was good enough for all these generations of magnificent people is good enough for some of us nowadays. That these little theatres should have survived and persisted for so long in so many countries under so many different civilisations, argues an indomitable vitality, a sacred irrepressibility.

So there is at least the dignity of old age about a Punch and Judy show, and as a final proof of its entire respectability it only suffices for me to say that notable people like Goethe, Voltaire, George Sand, Dumas, Maeterlinck, Anatole France, and a hundred others have expressed their love and admiration for puppet-shows in the most extravagant terms.

"He who invented puppet-shows was a greater benefactor to his species than he who invented operas," said William Hazlitt, and he concludes one of his

essays on the drama by confessing that he liked "a comedy better than a tragedy, a farce better than a comedy, a pantomime better than a farce, but that he liked a puppet-show the best of all."

On this let the curtain rise! They are gay creatures, these puppets, who would rather live out their present life than discuss at too great a length their historical origin. They are impatient to present their small but cheerful beings before the immensity of this twentieth century, which, being quite the latest thing in centuries, they no doubt respectfully look upon as the most superior, and are therefore the more excited to make its acquaintance and to see if they can continue their long existence and compete for public popularity against the staggering and complicated immensities of cinema and wireless.

Come, then!

Up with the curtain!

THE PEEP SHOW

I

MAKING THE PUPPETS—THE THEATRE IS CHRISTENED—ENTER WILLIAM—MR. PUNCH AND THE POLICE—THE FIRST JOURNEY—THE FIRST PERFORMANCE

ONE morning in March you might have seen me standing at the bench in my shirt-sleeves with a stout piece of walnut wood in my hands. It was a long piece of wood, and looking into it reflectively I saw there the gay company of puppets which were to be carved out of it with mallet and chisel. I divided the length into parts and marked them off; each part was soon to be a lively puppet head. On the first division I drew the outlines of a cheeky boy, cut away the superfluous wood with a saw, and lo! the great work was begun.

All showmen should make their own figures. Like a picture, a puppet-show should be a work of art, dominated by one personality, organised into a harmonious production of form and colour by one definite style of thought.

It is all good work for an artist; it embraces all the

Arts and the Crafts. There is the designing and the making of the little theatre; the creation and carving of the wooden-headed company of actors; the making of the stage properties and the costumes, and finally the composing of suitable scenes and plays.

It seemed to me part of the game that I should do all this myself. It is the tradition, and a very good tradition, that in between the shows the puppet-showman should be discovered seated by the roadside making a new figure or reviving an old one with a new coat of paint.

When I got to work I soon discovered that I must be a sculptor, a painter, and a poet, not to mention a designer, a carpenter, a decorator, a tailor, and a dressmaker; and when it came to performing I had to speak clearly like an actor, to sing in any required voice, to be a musician, an impersonator, and, when anything went wrong, an improvisatore. I must be a tragedian, a clown, a man, a woman, or a child as the scenes demanded. It was a formidable array of requirements, but I trusted in the puppets and they found all these talents for me in a sufficient measure.

After the first saw cuts on the piece of walnut wood I was confronted by a grim, angular visage which seemed to me a masterpiece of futurist art. But I do not like these dismal, futurist faces made out of straight lines, so I attacked the affair with a mallet and a sharp gouge.

Bang! Bang! The chips began to fly and the scowling face underwent a rapid change. As the work progressed I grew more and more inspired.

Bang! Bang! This was going to be a veritable revolution in the history of British Dramatic Art—a Punch and Judy without any Punch, without any Judy, and without any Toby.

Bang! Bang! Bang! This was to be a grand affair, a show worthy of Goethe, Voltaire, George Sand, Anatole France, Hazlitt, and all the other devotees.

The old show is perfect in its way. It comprises and exhibits vividly all the peculiar talents of this form of puppet. It has passed through the hands of hundreds of clever showmen, and a perfect manipulation and type of performance has evolved. But all the same it is old, it is dying, it is an antique falling to pieces. It is out of date and like some of the jokes in the Elizabethan Drama which make us blush for the coarseness of our ancestors. To students of art and folklore it is interesting, and to us who understand it is the best of fun.

But we must remember that there is an obstinate idea in existence that this entertainment is for children, and I can say from experience that it is very easy to frighten children with throwing the baby out of the window, with the murders, the gruesome hanging, and the stuffing of a corpse into a black coffin. Surely the whole British nation, of how many millions I do not know, need not be slaves to this one idea. After three hundred years we might try to think of something a little more suitable to the times; surely these charming little theatres may be inhabited by other characters, furnished with other scenes, and provide us with some fun out of other subjects. Yes, with regard to Punch

and Judy shows it is necessary that we should have a revolution.

All this time the head of the cheeky boy was progressing. Even in the plain wood, without any articulated features, there was some life about him, and all the time I was carving he seemed to be looking at me. In a few days he received a preliminary coat of paint, was christened Pippi, put on a stick in a ginger-beer bottle to dry, to think about himself, and prepare his mind in readiness for his entry into the great world. He looked hopeful as he stared at the blank workshop wall with a perpetual grin.

The weeks had slipped by into May before the revolution was well on its way, and I found myself being stared at by a sort of stock company of comic puppet heads, eight in number, all in a row, stuck into ginger-beer bottles. There was John Barleycorn and his wife Martha; there was the boy Pippi, a Pierrot, a pretty girl named Sally, a Prize-fighter, a Monkey, and somehow or other the eighth head had developed into a Parson. They all stared at me and at the world about them with a sort of eagerness as if they were expecting something to happen.

I was getting excited. I was anxious to get them on the road. I wanted to see them in a theatre of their own, falling in love, quarrelling, fighting, singing, speaking, intriguing, in a word behaving like a lot of human beings, evolving endless dramas of the amusing kind. For all my plays were to have happy endings. I was going to have that much say in this new community of beings which I was creating—murders, divorces, suicides, and all the sordid paraphernalia of

the literary drama I would leave to the real, clever playwrights and the Sunday newspapers.

I began to make costumes for some of the puppets, searching the family bag of oddments for materials, and I soon had four of them fully completed with costumes and hands. They immediately struck up some conversations with one another and became great adepts both at boxing each other's ears, at embracing one another, and in dancing.

There was nothing in the bag among the odd pieces of silks, satins and muslins which was suitable for the Prize-fighter's costume, and I was in despair until I came upon an old pair of eccentric corduroy trousers, long past wear, which had been hanging in a cupboard for years. So! this was why the gods had led me to preserve these garments! I soon stretched them out on the floor and attacked them with a pair of scissors, cutting out the less worn pieces. Corduroy was just the material for this character who was also to impersonate proletarians, burglars, and be the general rough lot of the company. This precedent was so successful that various old garments came under the scissors. The Monkey's skin came from an old Jaegar coat; the basis of Pippi's costume was from a cast-off girl's frock, while the Parson's handsome and well-dressed appearance was due to the excellent cloth of an abandoned riding-habit.

While the paint on the heads was getting dry and hard my thoughts turned to designing the theatre in which they were to act. I adopted the time-honoured style for that sort of thing, a wooden framework to be covered with striped or checked curtains. The frame-

work was to be collapsible so that the four long poles could be strapped to the sides of the two boxes and used as shafts for pushing the truck about. After a week's sawing, planing and jointing, this framework, with a brightly painted proscenium, loomed large and blue painted in the workshop.

Then arose the difficulty of a name. As I did not intend to play the old drama I could not call it a Punch and Judy, and there was no other name! In other countries these theatres and this kind of puppet worked upon the hand have a technical name. In France they are "Guignols," in Italy "Burattini," and the theatre is called a "castello"; but in England we only know them under the general name of puppets or as Punch and Judy figures. So here was a responsibility. It was necessary to invent a name. I invented a thousand and rejected them all, until at last by a painful evolutionary process I arrived at The Peep Show. The real peep-shows, those black cabinets into which you peer through little holes at an illuminated scene are defunct, and I hoped that their departed spirits would never rise up against me as I blazoned in gold letters over the proscenium—THE PEEP SHOW.

With four puppets complete and the framework of the theatre ready you may think that I felt myself to be progressing. But the truth is I was on the verge of despair; my mind was fermenting with a hundred and one little problems, all needing to be solved before the equipment was a complete and practical affair.

I had to consider the question of wind as it would never do for the theatre to blow over. This happened once to the Punch and Judy man on the Bournemouth

beach, and the awful discovery was made by some sharp children that there was a man inside!

There was the question of how I was to carry everything; how large the two boxes must be, and what strength and size of wheels I must use. What colour should I paint the boxes? How many shirts should I carry? How much room would there be for plates, cups, saucers, teapots and elegant things like that? Whether I should make a large box or a discreet bag for collecting the pennies in. And always at the back of everything was the insistent query, what will the new performance be when the new theatre and the new puppets are all complete?

I made a list of all these things as they occurred to me, but it became so long and such a jumble of shirt studs, socks, tin-tacks, and tooth-brushes, that it was a great relief when it fell to the floor, and was swept up and burnt with the shavings.

It was a great mistake, all this worry and anxiety, for many of these questions solved themselves very naturally when the time came. The difficult choice between a bag or box for the collection was decided very easily and successfully by the classic practice of "passing round the hat," and as for the performance the puppets decided that when they found an audience before them.

March, April and May had passed in these preparations, and it was really time for me to be taking the road. Many months might have been spent in designing, redesigning, and considering puppets, costumes, plays, scenery and properties. But fortunately I was spurred on by circumstances—I had my living to get!

It was just then that William stepped into the story—William, who is an artist and also a maker of puppets. He came into the workshop one day when the puppets were fooling about round their proscenium. He was full of interest and encouragement in the scheme, and as we talked it over he became a little envious. In the end it was arranged that he should accompany me on the first week of the adventure, and here was a great speeding up of the preparations, for William undertook to produce the truck and the two boxes for carrying the puppets and the camp. He had just the pair of light, strong wheels, and as for the boxes, well, they were margarine boxes when William started on them, but in the end they were an object of admiration wherever they went. We fixed upon a date of departure two weeks ahead when I was to make a start with the show, or as much of it as was ready by then, and a few days after that I was to be joined by William when the travels proper would begin.

Two weeks! Had I been organising an expedition to the North Pole I could not have worked harder or with more anxiety. More and more I began to see that a Punch and Judy show was a serious affair, and that it was capable of absorbing an immense amount of thought and hard work. How ridiculous it is that we should have to labour so hard for a bit of fun like that!

And then a new hare was started. Someone suggested that a licence would be necessary to permit me to exhibit the show in the streets. At the first opportunity I visited a police station to make inquiries. I

was nervous. A policeman's helmet has always such a way of looking down on one, and a police station did not seem to be the right place at all in which to discuss Punch and Judy shows. I found my man, the chief inspector or some such dignitary, at the top of a flight of stairs, and from that point of vantage he shouted down to me at the bottom.

"Hullo there! What do you want?"

I would much rather have got him in a quiet corner and whispered my business to him, but his magnetic personality compelled me to bellow back up the stairs.

"If you please, I wanted to know if I could do a Punch and Judy show in the streets."

And would you believe it, the various undressed constables, cleaners, painters and odd workers about the place took not the slightest notice of me. They did not look at me and even the carts in the streets rattled by as usual. Only the chief inspector spoke, one word, a crushing word, a short, sharp:

"No!"

But then he looked at me over his spectacles in just that way which officials do who have said something with which they wish to frighten you, and I knew that there was more to come.

"No," he repeated, "I can't have anything of that sort here, the streets are too narrow. You can go to Rodborough, or Gain's Cross, or anywhere round about, but not in the town itself, it's too dangerous. You go to Rodborough—you'll be safe there. Yes, you go to Rodborough."

I thanked him for that permission and then asked if

I would have to take out any sort of a licence, or get permission from local authorities.

"No," he shouted down the stairs, "no licence is necessary, and I am the local authority. I give you permission to perform anywhere round about you like, Gain's Cross or Rodborough—you go to Rodborough!" With that he turned away and disappeared through a door.

"You go to——" What could he mean by Rodborough! I could not help thinking that this must be some new or some local, or more polite method of sending one to the Devil!

It was all rather unsatisfactory and uncertain, and I wished I could have bought a threepenny licence, and had something tangible in black and white. Anyhow, I decided not to go to Rodborough. I felt there was a catch in it somewhere.

With a devastating suddenness those two weeks came to an end, and Monday, June 11th, the day for setting out, had arrived. The equipment was in a very scattered condition, but according to programme I commenced to collect it together and pack up. I began very mechanically, still wishing that I had a little more time in which to remake one of the puppets, to paint another, to make a few more amusing properties and, Good Heavens! I had no performance ready, the puppets had not had a single rehearsal, and here I was talking about a revolution in Punch and Judy shows. Some of my little problems were soon solved; they went into the box to be attended to later on. The tent was packed without an intended patch, and as for the new guy lines they were packed away uncut in the

brown paper as they came from the shop. The puppets were collected from various hooks and nails where they had been hanging head downwards to dry. I no longer looked upon them as things to be made, I saw them now as a cheerful crowd of actors and they all had something to say as they went into the box. Stout old Martha was still being dressed for me, her plumpness being furnished by the stuffing of a tea cosy. And one puppet head went in without any costume at all; he would have to get himself fixed up somehow or other later on. As the packing progressed, away went all my difficulties, dispelled by a new vision of the jolly life to come, the excitement of performing and all the lovely wayside camps which I would find. But all the same it was five o'clock in the evening before the whole caboose was ready for the road, that it moved, altogether, on its own wheels out of the workshop into the orchard, and I stood at last a complete travelling showman.

That was journey enough for that day; I had made a start on the appointed date, so I unpacked there and then, put up the theatre as a practice test, and went through a performance, the first performance from which improvisation of half an hour the present show has developed.

II

FIRST STEPS—AMONG THE UTOPIANS—A VILLAGE FÊTE —I ATTACK A SANATORIUM

THE scene of these preparations was laid in a romantic cottage high up in the wilds of the Cotswold Hills. Here was a lonely and discreet place for a shy novice to take his first steps in the trade of exhibiting a Punch and Judy show, and on the Tuesday morning a family party of us were to be seen pulling The Old Encumbrance, for so the vehicle had been christened, down the garden path, under the honeysuckle bower, and through the garden gates, until finally with a wobble and a bump this strange vehicle was really launched upon the public road.

The way led immediately up a stiff hill with a loose surface deeply rutted with dragirons. Here was a supreme test for the travelling capacities of the outfit, for if it would go up this chute of sand and rocks and stones then it would go anywhere. Under the united efforts of the family, with the help of songs and cheers, The Old Encumbrance moved up the hill as lightly as a feather. It even proved a possible, if heavy, task for one, and such was the issue of this test that I saw no reason against doing puppet-shows as high in the world as I liked. At the top of the hill the road

ran level and here a child could trundle the thing easily. We all had a go; we pulled it, we pushed it, we walked, ran, and even galloped with it, until no doubt remained in our minds that, pushing this combination of camp and puppet theatre, one could trudge round the world.

But in the meantime we contented ourselves with this high road of the hills, making our way from the Beacon Tump at Haresfield, to the heights of Scots Quarry, and from there through the Edge to the little grey town of Painswick. This brought us into touch with civilisation where we travelled under observant and critical eyes. The new trade advertised itself well by its very existence. We hardly passed a dog that did not get excited and set up a barking; most of the horses looked at us askance and tried to get by sideways in a hurry; as for the people, they stood still and stared, wondering what sort of an affair it was we were pushing about.

These first steps culminated in a roadside lunch; my escort drank to the success of The Peep Show in Gloucestershire cider, and putting myself to the shafts I shoved round the corner to find myself alone, launched upon the world with a travelling puppet-show. And then, almost immediately, it began to rain!

Now half-way between Stroud and Birdlip, on the top of the Cotswolds is to be found that famous and courageous attempt to establish an Utopia known as Whiteway Colony, and it was to this place that I was making my way. Here I would find an unconventional and hopelessly romantic people like myself; they would allow me to camp on their ground, I would

rehearse the show upon them, and so begin to rub off some of my amateurish feelings before a more or less sympathetic audience.

This Colony was founded some twenty years ago from a Tolstoyan impulse, the idea being to establish there a sort of communal peasant life. The ground was purchased, and as a burnt-offering to the gods and an example to all mankind, the title deeds were made into a bonfire, and the ground thus set free for the cultivation of food and of ideal men and women, instead of the usual weedy crop of rent, of landlords and lawyers. The community existed only a short time, its personnel not being fitted for the task. These brave Tolstoyans were drawn from various parts of society, and among them I believe were a journalist, a retired banker, a prize-fighter, a sailor or two, and some Quakers, but I never heard of a single agriculturist being in the group.

Coming to their piece of ground on the summit of the Cotswolds without a working experience of the land, they found it difficult to grow anything in that wind-swept region of stones. Certain of the communists laboured in the spirit rather than in the flesh, and an annoyance sprang up between the idealists and the practical workers. They existed on beans and potatoes, for they had little to live on while their first crops were maturing. The surrounding farmers took advantage of their non-resistance principles and allowed cattle to roam over the new, unfenced settlement. Trouble arose over taking firewood from the woods. These simple-lifers believed in the vitalising powers of sunlight, but being discovered working in

less clothing than was usual in the district, they were arraigned before the substantially dressed police and accused of indecency. The community collapsed, but eventually various individuals took plots of the ground and settled down as independent experimenters in the simple life, and it is a testimony to their courage and persistence that they are still there, that they have brought that stubborn soil under cultivation, and have been able to obtain an existence under such difficult circumstances.

As I said, no sooner was I alone with all this caboodle of puppet-show and camp and my living to get, than it began to rain—a grey melancholy rain. According to plan I unrolled the ground sheet of my tent and spread it over the vehicle; it fitted to perfection, and putting on my Burberry, I found myself and my belongings so well protected from the wet that I went singing (and perspiring) up the hill through the woods to the Whiteway Colony. Thus two doubts were dispelled, I could pull my bus up the stiffest of hills, and ordinary rain need have no terrors for me.

I soon tumbled into a meal and a camp at the Colony, and very soon afterwards a lecture too, for these simple-lifers have active minds, and although they do not work their gardens communally they exchange their knowledge freely with one another and organise debates and lectures in one or other of their wooden houses.

After the lecture the audience began developing schemes for The Peep Show. They entered into the affair with an alarming enthusiasm and at least a dozen were for joining in the adventure. The next day I must

give a show to the children, and the day after that to the adults. Then I must settle down at the Colony and they would find audiences for me all round the countryside. Meanwhile my host, who had just returned from a winter in Morocco, was all for my going there. He could promise me large and happy audiences, the Moroccans love entertainments, they are like huge, happy children; they would give me more applause than money, but I need not worry about that as they can always feed travellers with their abundance of prickly pears, and every village has its special traveller's house.

I was ravished by these schemes, but to begin with I was very glad to get a chance of practising on these two audiences at the Colony. One being for children and one for adults they would be an experience in different treatments of the performance. It was my ambition to keep the show in a sort of fluid state so that it could be adapted to all kinds of shapes and sizes of audiences, and first and foremost I sought a cheerful spontaneity.

The puppets scrambled through a performance for the Colony children and made some valuable discoveries; but what the children thought of it would be difficult to say, for as soon as it was over they rushed away to their play as if nothing very important had happened. For the adults I experimented in making up two of the puppets to represent the two colonists who had lately returned from Morocco, where they had enjoyed great adventures amongst fleas. The scene represented them packing up their goods, an ungodly collection, and making a sudden

departure from these inconvenient and unnecessary insects. It was a vulgar subject, and it made me blush when I remembered my grand ambitions for reforming the Punch and Judy show, but when I found the audience laughing sufficiently to hold up the course of the play, I swallowed my shame easily, ran the fleas for all they were worth, and felt no end of a wag.

The colonists were very encouraging and after having used them for rehearsing they retaliated by sending the hat round and collecting the cheerful amount of seven shillings and ninepence for the Peep Show man. This was my first collection, and as I carried it about in my pockets, nearly all in copper, it jingled sweetly.

The kind attentions of the colonists did not stop here, for they introduced me to the neighbouring village of Sheepscombe, which on the Saturday was to hold a Fête on the village green. After nervously interviewing a committee of ladies it was decided that I should perform during the course of the Fête and take up a collection. This seemed an ideal proposition, a village green and a Fête, and on the Saturday afternoon, with the help of several of the colonists, the Peep Show descended upon the village of Sheepscombe and all its gaiety. One of the colonists, being a Continental, was struck into a profound melancholy at the aspect of this jollification, and as he surveyed the scene continually exclaimed in hollow tones:

"But! Where is the Fête!"

This was because all we could see was a small tea-table at one end of the green, and at the other end a single stall, a dismal-looking jumble sale, which three

or four old ladies dressed in black were picking over like so many crows. A few children as well were standing about depressed into inactivity under the responsibility of their Sunday clothes. There was a cricket match in progress as part of the proceedings, but here in the Cotswolds, cricket pitches are not easily come by, and this was taking place on a hill-top two miles away. In due course this cricket match and a small brass band returned to the village where both settled down to their tea. By that time a good sprinkling of people had turned out, and although I was admiring the scene in this village of picturesque grey houses which stood out against the green valley, my Continental friend sighed and said:

"But! Where is the Fête!"

To divert his attention I asked his advice as to where we should pitch The Peep Show. We settled on a level spot below the war memorial, the incline up to which would provide a natural amphitheatre for the audience. So we got to work and put the framework together which seemed to send a thrill of excitement through the Fête, and we were soon surrounded by the children in a high state of curiosity. After tea there were to be some games and folk dancing, and it had been arranged that at half-past seven The Peep Show was to wind up the proceedings. But as we prepared the theatre there was a general movement towards us and in a few minutes the amphitheatre was packed with a waiting and expectant crowd. I had only intended to get my affairs arranged, but as I was enjoying a little rehearsal inside the curtains, I suddenly heard the schoolmaster introducing me to the audience, and I realised that my

first public show to a crowd of strangers was an immediate proposition.

There was nothing for it but to pull off my coat and strike up my prelude of squeaky music with all the force of which I was capable. This was my first outdoor performance and I blew so hard in order to make every one hear that the instrument was forced out of my mouth in the middle of the tune, fell to the floor, and was lost to me for the rest of the show. This was a disconcerting start, but I seized a couple of puppets and plunged into the performance. As far as I was concerned it was one of those uncomfortable shows where everything goes wrong, and one is thinking about the last mistake instead of concentrating on the present. There was a good round of applause at the end, but all the same I felt that I would have liked to do it all over again before I took up a collection. The schoolmaster, however, had got to work with his hat, so on my side I started collecting too.

Taking up the collection put me in a better humour, for I was relieved to find that it was a very natural and pleasant thing to do. Most of the contributions were given with a friendly smile and frequent remarks such as " That's good," " I haven't laughed so much for a long time," and " I hope we shall see you again some day." The schoolmaster and I united our collections and we counted out the amount, which completely restored my good humour, for it came out to the magnificent sum of nine shillings and elevenpence three farthings, comprised of seventy pennies, twenty-one halfpence, four sixpences, one threepenny-bit, and one farthing which I treasure to this day. Very

rashly I put this conglomeration into my trouser pocket and the weight of it nearly pulled those garments off. I weighed my catch afterwards, as proud as any fisherman, and found it to be exactly two pounds.

With my two collections amounting to seventeen shillings and eightpence three farthings, and a performance which, if rather short, proved to be amusing, I was already feeling an experienced and accomplished showman. The light-weight camp was getting into order too ; and at the end of another week what would I care for a goose-feather bed. And in these days I had begun to realise the joys of being a wandering showman, that it would bring me into touch with many happy gatherings of all kinds of people.

Having spent the week in running round their houses and gardens, the colonists pack up their food and children, their guests and the Peep Show man into cars and cycle-cars, and take them off to the woods for a picnic on the Sunday. Here in a green glade we took our lunch, we played at cricket with half a bat and a corrugated-iron wicket ; we climbed trees, and we played at twos and threes, and in the evening we returned home to our beds joyful and rejuvenated.

On the Monday morning I left the friendly Colony and plunged deeper into the mysterious future. This was quite the real thing to be leaving shows behind and going on vaguely to something new. I wandered along the Cotswold lanes with a feeling of abounding freedom stimulated by a gentle excitement as to what the day had in store for me. Outside a farm I left The Old Encumbrance while I went inside to buy some milk. When I returned two roadmen were surveying my

property from the centre of the road. They were slow of speech, in fact they said nothing at all, but they were obviously amiable and bursting with curiosity.

"You would hardly think that I had a house and theatre packed up there, would you?" said I.

"Ha! Ha!" said young and tall.

"Haw! Haw!" said old grey whiskers.

"In here I have a stove and some cooking pots. I'm my own cook, I am."

"Ha! Ha!" said young and tall.

"Haw! Haw!" said old grey whiskers.

"And this ground-sheet is my bed. It's not very thick so there is no danger of falling out."

"Haw! Haw!" said old grey whiskers.

"Ha! Ha!" said young and tall.

"And all this fits up into a theatre where my puppets perform. It's a sort of Punch and Judy show."

Here old grey whiskers woke up in jubilation. "Haw! Haw! I told 'ee as it wur a Poonch and Joody."

I got away from them just in time. A little more of this Ha! Ha! Haw! Haw! from these two puppets and I would have begun to believe that my mind was affected; that I was beginning to look upon all the world as a puppet-show.

I had decided to approach a large Sanatorium in the district and offer them a show. My innocent idea was to just stroll in, do the show, take up a jolly little collection, and stroll out. But things are not quite so simple as this; the prospect of a Punch and Judy show in that Sanatorium was a serious affair. I progressed from a patient, who wanted the show passionately, to a

sympathetic secretary, and then to the grave and dignified matron. After this there was a series of telephone messages to the doctor in a neighbouring town and then more deliberations. The patients would like it, the sisters would like it, and the matron would like it, but it was not until an hour's waiting after all this that the radiant secretary appeared, with the doctor's permission and a generous donation to the collection. So there and then I fixed up the show in the Recreation Room while the patients were being gathered in, the ladies, or as one of the patients put it, "the bunnies," in front, the gents behind, with a dignified semicircle of sisters at the back. It is one thing to do a puppet-show in one's own time, but altogether another affair to do it like this in a rush. The matron never unbent once; I did not get a single smile from her, and I had an uncomfortable feeling from her manner that I was rather a nuisance. But I muddled along through the sketchy performance to the accompaniment of hilarious laughter, and within the hour had set up the theatre, performed, collected ten shillings and eightpence halfpenny, packed up again, and was pulling out of the gates to the road. I was in a dazed condition; this sort of thing took more out of me than I would have thought. But all the same I was pleased to think that I had been able to amuse these sick people, and some of them were in a desperate, dismal way, what with illness and being forced to live in the quiet but beautiful country which they did not like. If I could give people like this something new to think about for a bit I would begin to feel quite a useful and legitimate member of society.

I pulled my old caboose into the woods and knocked at a cottage door to get some water. Three small children came to the door and when they saw me they ran off pell-mell calling out:

" Mother, mother ! Here's the Peep Show man ! Come and see ! "

Mother appeared at once with a radiant face, to have a look at me.

" I've heard about you," she said, " the children have spoken about nothing else since they saw your entertainment at Sheepscombe. They enjoyed it ever so much. I quite wish I had been there myself."

So already I was famous and I returned with the water to set up my camp in the woods as proud as Punch himself.

As I sat by a wood fire that evening in the calm whispering greenwood, I felt that I had come to the end of all the struggles and doubts of the last few months. Here I was with a delightful camp, with my travelling theatre and house tried out, and twenty-seven shillings already earned clinking in my pockets. Here was a famous start, and if I could keep on roaming from camp to camp, and show to show in this manner, I need never bother myself to envy the millionaires.

III

WILLIAM JOINS THE SHOW—STEAMERS TO MINEHEAD—WE ARE GREENHORNS

TUESDAY began as peacefully as Monday ended. It is true that I was awakened at five o'clock by a cow which tore up the grass, chewed, coughed, sneezed and grunted its noisy slobbering way all round the tent, and finally fetched me out of my comfortable sleeping-sack by gambolling through some low bushes on one side and pulling out a side cord of the tent. According to all the comic writers on camping, the nasty sarcastic people, this should have made me very angry, but I was too pleased with the lovely sight of the glade, of the sun rising behind the beech trees, and shooting through the leaves in misty beams to the dewy grass. Some rabbits were nibbling the turf, and all the birds were singing with crazy enthusiasm; the smoke of my wood fire soon rose blue and fragrant wandering through the surrounding trees, and I breakfasted.

There was a new experience confronting The Peep Show to-day. We were to be joined by William, and for the next week to travel in the classic manner of old with a showman and an outside man. We were also to be joined by William's camping impedimenta, and it

would be interesting to see how The Old Encumbrance was going to adapt itself to a double burden. It was already well filled, and at the Colony I had had to refuse some generous but large offers of potatoes and cabbages, of pieces of wood for new puppets, of an enormous antique dagger in a leather sheath, which the owners thought might be an amusing property for the puppets, but which they really wished to get rid of because in ancient days it had committed a murder.

Accordingly at midday I was at the rendezvous under the larch trees at Paradise, which is not where it used to be when we were children, but is now on the slopes of Painswick Beacon, just above the Adam and Eve Inn. William was there with a party of friends to picnic with us, and also two new puppets, a century-old flageolet, a trumpet to announce the show with, a sleeping-sack, a blanket, a ground-sheet, a lantern, a fisherman's jersey, a—but I will only mention the really interesting things, the block of chocolate, the biscuits, the plug of tobacco, and the *Works of William Shakespeare* in one volume.

We gave an exhibition of light-weight camping and how we were going to fit ourselves into our little tent. We gave a united performance in The Peep Show, introducing the two new puppets, one a modern long-haired artist, and the other a nice old-fashioned countryman in a smock. And of course we touched our elegant friends for a collection. Our private show was joined by two mothers, two children and a pram, who all settled down comfortably and naturally on the grass. They paid us the compliment of thinking that it was ever so much nicer than an ordinary Punch and

Judy show, and that it had nothing vulgar in it. We were interested in the behaviour of these commoners because of two old pedants who strolled into the midst of our picturesque proceedings, surveyed us calmly, and talked pompously about some delightful scene in some book or other of which it reminded them. And then in spite of all their learning they stood some three yards from the theatre with their backs to the puppets, and talked in loud voices of their friends who all seemed to be suffering from horrible illnesses. This was our first experience of the distractions to be encountered in open-air shows and we took it to ourselves as a lesson, as a first exercise in becoming steeled against a callous public which interests itself habitually in crime and disease, neglecting the bright and glorious world of art. The puppets rose to the occasion with ready impudence, one of the company leaning round the proscenium listening to this conversation, and reporting his eavesdroppings to the audience. As a final blow these two old gentlemen were not interested in the collection to which the two mothers, the two children, and the pram had contributed readily.

The packing that evening presented some problems. We got the new puppets and their properties into the puppet box, and into the camping box we squashed the sleeping-sacks, the blankets, the chocolate, and all the precious things to be kept dry. And when William explained to me with tears in his eyes that he had bought the *Works of William Shakespeare* in one volume when he was three years old, that he had been meaning to read it ever since, that he always carried it with him wherever he went, and that he thought just

that quiet, calm opportunity had presented itself for really reading it at last, we found room for that too. The rest of our junk we piled on top of the boxes, covered it with a ground-sheet, and strapped it down, which made our conveyance look more like a camel than a Punch and Judy show. William's discreet amount of baggage so satisfactorily disposed of, a new question arose—would he pull? After our journey that evening I was ashamed that such an idea could have come into my head, for William was like a boy with a new toy, he must be in the shafts all the time trying to do all the pulling. We travelled to the edge of the Cotswolds, where we camped, looking down on the glistening Severn winding its way through a misty panorama to the sea, in which direction we had decided to travel the next morning.

It never occurred to us that it might have been a wet day, and we trundled our affair down the hill to the plain with never a word of thanks for the glorious morning. By eleven o'clock we had reached the Gloucester and Sharpness canal, and here we sat down on the bank and waited. The object of our waiting soon came puffing round a bend of the canal, approached gracefully, and hove to at the bridge. Lifting our cabriolet we hauled it over the railings of this river steamer; we stepped on board ourselves, lashed the show down firmly, and were soon jogging along the placid waters of the canal, through the low country round the River Severn. The boatmen recognised us at once as a Punch and Judy show, and found a job for us at a Sunday School Treat being held somewhere down the canal that afternoon. But we

were intent upon pushing forward to the sea ; we were fired with the gay idea of getting a tramp steamer at the port of Sharpness which would drop us somewhere in Devon or Cornwall, where, amongst the holiday people we would find large audiences and soon enrich ourselves with enormous collections.

Already we began to pay for our wicked ambition to get rich, for the port of Sharpness was not at all romantic, and we found ourselves pulling the puppets over rusting cables and railway lines, along cinder paths, among ramshackle offices and untidy lumber yards. We had just missed a boat for Bristol, and as for Devon and Cornwall, something might turn up if we waited a month or two. William's enthusiasm for anything in the way of a ship led us to two boats which were settling down to unload. It was just such a boat as that, he said, that we wanted, but my secret thoughts at the time were that they looked very dirty, untidy places, that the crews were more rough than amusing, and that bloaters and tea and swearing would be the diet. In the meantime a sailorman was walking round and round our conveyance, studying it intently, and he finally decided that it was a Punch and Judy show, that they were very good wheels, and that we were " properly boxed in."

There being no hope of a boat at Sharpness we pulled through the town out on to the Bristol road, and partly by walking and partly by train, we arrived at Mangotsfield on a showery evening. Here we got permission to camp for the night, and leaving our precious belongings in a cart-shed of the farm, we took train to Bristol to investigate the shipping affairs, but

arranged nothing more romantic than to go to Minehead by the ordinary passenger boat in the morning.

After a good night on the heights of Mangotsfield with plenty of new-mown hay for our bed, and a good breakfast on a haycock in the open, sunny morning, we got into Bristol and began to negotiate a real city with our vehicle. We were too possessed with our dream of the future, of the romance of Devon and Cornwall, to think of showing in an ordinary place like Bristol, and we made directly for Hotwells and the boats. As we pulled past the Cathedral down towards the river The Old Encumbrance rattled pleasantly. As our vehicle danced its way over the cobbles and we got visions of ships' riggings and spars in between the houses, after passing Ship Inns and Anchor Inns and a rope shop or two, William's sailor soul awoke, which set him singing the "Watchet Sailor" until we rounded a corner, and came out to the River Avon to find ourselves confronted with the deep rocky gorge and the famous Suspension Bridge, which come upon suddenly like that seems to touch the sky.

At the embarking stage we were treated like Royalty. A gate was opened for us and we were conducted to the boat before the long queue of waiting passengers. Such a friend of one and all is old Punch that the blue-jerseyed sailormen sprang into life at sight of us, and behaving like a Gilbert and Sullivan chorus they flung out a special gangway with jocular cries of "Here comes Punch!" "Make room for Punch and Judy!" "Are you going to give us a show?" They lifted our vehicle on board, there were six or seven of them, carried it tenderly under hatches, and lashed it to the

mast with a brotherly interest, but alarmed us at the end by saying:

"There! That will be seven and sixpence extra!"

There was a vague idea in our minds of doing our show to the passengers, but as soon as we had cleared Keyhaven and were out of the Avon, the movement of the boat and the strong wind soon dispelled that notion. We settled down to enjoy our trip with the sun shining down on us and the spray breaking over us.

We reached Minehead in the afternoon and disembarked The Old Encumbrance ourselves, which was no mean adventure, for we had to shoulder it down the unstable gangways with the cold, cruel waves lashing below us; and then we had to carry it up a slippery iron staircase to the higher deck of the pier, and our exhaustion was completed by having to pay fourpence to go off the pier. There was an urge within us to be professional. We were rather ashamed of travelling in a respectable passenger boat like holiday-makers, but were a little reconciled by the numbers of buskers with violins, guitars, mandolines and banjos, who had disembarked at the various points of call. We determined to get to work as soon as possible, and consequently began our campaign in Minehead by having a good and comfortable tea.

By the time we had reached the Promenade we had discussed the possibilities of performing with the young girl who served us with tea, with a postman, with a distinguished grey-bearded gentleman, and with several boys. They discussed the question quite seriously; a show had been seen on the Promenade some years ago, and as the photograph man and the

buskers took up a stand there, the good people saw no reason why we should not do the same. The Promenade widened out in the centre and was planted with trees. By its very structure it invited a performer and a crowd, and by putting up The Peep Show under one of the trees we supplied just the right artistic touch. We looked round nervously for a policeman or some interfering official but there were none in sight. A few children spread the news for us, William blew rousing blasts on his twopenny trumpet, and John Barleycorn poked his head out of the front, the sides, and the back of the theatre, announcing that we were about to begin. A small crowd gathered round from which William collected while I went through a performance; and then we changed positions, William performing whilst I took up another collection. As soon as I appeared, a little Cockney chap came up to me in a very knowing manner and said sarcastically:

" I don't know if you are doing this benevolently or for a living, but your pal missed a lot of collection—those and those," and here he waved his hand to some people about a hundred yards away sitting with their backs to the theatre.

" But," I said, greenhorn that I was, " they can't see the show."

He looked at me with a mixture of incredulity and scorn while an amused smile spread over his sharp features.

" Can't see the show," he repeated mockingly after me. " What you want to do is to get round with the hat because you know you are working hard. That's clever work that you are doing and you don't want to

do it for nothing. In fact you needn't work for your living at all if you knew anything about the road. But you're green; I could see that as soon as I saw you. All you want to do is to make a bit of a noise on an instrument—that's quite enough—but you must 'ave a smart collector, one who doesn't miss anything. Here, give us 'old of the hat, I'll have a go round for you if you like."

I did not like. I haughtily refused his professional example and went round myself. I was nervous and confused and did not look closely at the people to whom I presented the hat, until, being surprised by one individual who shouted out very loudly, " Oh yes ! Certainly ! Of course ! " I discovered that I had extracted a donation from the very man who was seeking to teach me the art of collecting.

As we were packing up the show he appeared again with a Bohemian companion carrying a mandoline on his back, and evidently fearing our rivalry they tried to pump us as to our plans, advising us to go into the villages round about where we would do much better than in Minehead. But then the photograph-while-you-wait man entered the discussion, and in the foulest of language and at the top of his voice, shouted:

" You stay here, mate. This place is a goldmine. You've got a good thing there—I wish I had it. The old-fashioned thing is going to be the coming thing, yes, that's it—the old is going to be the new. You stick to this place, mate, it's a goldmine. I've been here five years and I hope I shall be here another five. It's a goldmine. You stick to it and I dare say I can put you right with the right people."

We began to feel that Punch and Judy showing in Minehead was a real serious business, with an opposition to encounter. Our collection had been wrested from the buskers and we felt their envy upon us. If we had to stay here all the season we should be condemned to a career of plot and intrigue, a gruesome affair of hard business; and as we packed up our sticks and loaded up The Old Encumbrance we experienced a great feeling of liberty at being able to pack up like this and fly from the swearing photograph man and the frowning buskers. As we pulled away from the Promenade they got to work again and we were followed by the sound of violin playing and " Photographs —photographs—'oos next—three for a bob, that's my price! "

We spent our collection in the Minehead shops and set out to find a camping site. About two miles from the town we came to a scrubby place with a cottage near by, and here, after pulling our bus up the steep bank, and rocking it over the clumps of heather, we pitched the tent and enjoyed a good supper provided for us by our exertions in the town.

A friendly woman passed us on her way home to the cottage, and we mentioned that we had got water from her husband at the cottage. Without the least embarrassment she explained to us the true state of affairs.

" I ain't got no husband—he's my intended. I took in him and a friend about two years ago, and we got friendly like, and now he wants to marry me. But I don't know, I've had one, you see, and now I'm my own master, and when I've got sixpence to spend, I spend it."

I took upon myself to recommend him as a nice, decent chap.

" Oh, yes," she agreed, " he's very willing and useful about the garden and the house, and that, but I think he'll have to wait a bit. Well, good night, young men, I'm sure I hope you'll have a good night. It's a healthy life, anyhow, plenty of fresh air."

After our varied day of travelling by train, by two steamers, and tramping by road, and after the excitement, not to mention the hard work of performing in Minehead, we were very pleased with our quiet camp on the hillside overlooking the valley and the rising downs beyond. We pottered about our jobs until the moon rose, and the bright stars appeared silently in the clear sky, then we crawled into our tent on all fours and lit our lantern. We sat side by side in our respective sleeping-sacks, with our heads touching the roof of the tent, our backs against the end, and our feet at the door. There was no room left for even a puppet. We completely filled the tent. We were snug.

" Ho ! Ho ! " said William, " this is all right, my boys ! Have a piece of chocolate ! "

" Ha ! Ha ! " said I, " I like this. I would rather be here than in one of those lodging-house rooms, among the iron railings and pavements of Minehead."

" Rather," agreed William, " this is better than a stuffy interior. I can't stand those furnished rooms which look like a nightmare on the hire system."

" Yes," said I, " and here we are free of all those screaming advertisements of teas, those hysterical announcements of beastly char-à-bancs trips, and those

altogether ever so much too much important advertisements of motor spirit."

"Why," said William, "we live in a poem. Out here on the moonlit hillside among the foxgloves and bracken, we enjoy the experience of living like romantic mountebanks in a picture."

Here he pulled out his ancient flageolet and began piping sweet Elizabethan airs, whilst I searched in the box for the interesting works of William Shakespeare in one volume. To read them? Oh dear no! I wanted to mend a large hole in one of my socks, and I remembered that when packing I had seen the darning wool just under the volume.

Presently we settled down to sleep, while outside in the moonlight a wandering nightjar serenaded us. Inside the tent we breathed the fresh air fragrant with thyme and lady's bedstraw, on clumps of which we had made our beds. It was not long before William began to snore, a thing which I never do myself.

IV

IN PORLOCK—THE PUPPET SCENES

WE came out of our tents in the morning to find a bright world all round us again. It is a great event to crawl out of one's tent into a morning like that. We did not have to hurry our breakfast, or run after a train, or worry a landlady for sandwiches before we could get into the wilds of Nature; we were there already in the first crystal clearness of the morning, and as the flowers unfolded their petals, and the bushes uncurled their leaves, we polished ourselves up with soap and water, and set our breakfast on to cook.

We packed up in not too great a hurry, for there beneath the magic touch of Nature, in the quiet, warm morning, we took our time from, and marched with, the elements, with the slow rolling clouds, the swaying trees, and all the little movements of the grasses and flowers. These gentle rhythms brought us by degrees down to the road where we trundled along beneath the mighty trees of oak and ash which tower above the winding road, making its way under the downs from Minehead to Porlock.

"This is fine," exclaimed William, who was cutting along between the shafts, already after two days an

accomplished vagabond. " I should like to live like this if I could carry a few more things with me—some carving tools, a turning lathe, a bathroom and a bed, a chest or two of books, and my friends. And I should like tramping about the roads and the country, especially if I had nothing to pull or push and nothing to carry."

As we wandered along among the rolling hills we made our plans for the day, and accomplished the first of them by arriving in Porlock before the carpenter had closed his workshop for the week-end. Here we bought some long wooden battens and screws, as we had decided to screw up the framework of the theatre permanently and travel with it ready for use, so that we could strike up a performance in as little time as possible.

The carpenter expressed his admiration for Punch and Judy shows, and hoped that we would perform in the town. In return, I expressed my admiration for his carpentry and said that I rather envied him.

" I would rather have your job," he said, " to get about from one place to another instead of being stuck in this workshop for ten hours a day, year in, year out. Yes, you do a show in Porlock this evening. The band will be out about half-past eight, and if I were you I should get in a show or two before then, about seven. I shall come along and have a look."

We decided to adopt his advice, and after some wandering and waiting we got a pitch for the tent in a meadow between the town and the sea. Here we spent the afternoon in carpentry and eating until it was time to get into the town with the show.

We had been advised to interview the policeman; he had been recommended to us as " a good sort," so we were not so nervous as we might have been, especially when we found him at his cottage in his shirt-sleeves. We mentioned to him the discreet place well away from the traffic of the narrow High Street where we had thought of pitching the theatre, but like the carpenter he began to arrange the affair for us.

" Now if you goos higher oop the street," he said, " you'll get more people like. They'll all be out there this evening, and if you was to goo oop outside the Castle Hotel—now look 'ee 'ere, sir, if I wur you I should speak to the landlord there, he's a good sort, and I lay he'd let you set oop outside on his piece there. That's it, you goo oop along and arsk 'e."

There was a kindliness about this suggestion which we could not resist, and we soon pulled up to the Castle Hotel and asked for the permission. The landlord entered into the affair with spirit. " What, do a Punch and Judy show, boy ! Yes, certainly, anywhere you like, and good luck and a good living to you." He sent out a boy to show us, to a hair's-breadth, the very best stand we could take, and there accordingly we set up the theatre.

It was not long before curious eyes were upon us, and passers-by halted in their promenade. We caught several housewives with their prams and babies out for the Saturday shopping. Sober workmen leaned up against the opposite fence smoking their pipes; several groups of promenading flappers took their stand before us arm-in-arm, and consequently the young bloods were pulled up too. Children clamoured round us wanting

to know how much it was to pay, and the simple generous-minded ones rushed off to get pennies, while the horrid clever ones stayed to see it for nothing. One boy offered us a penny on the spot, but William took his pipe from his mouth, refused the coin, and uttered that honest slogan—" Work first, pay afterwards."

With the first notes of the squeaky music someone in the audience began to laugh; at the first appearance of John Barleycorn the children gave a wild shout, and when Martha, his wife, looked out of her window and then fell out, the whole audience was captured and guffawed in unison. Through a hole in the curtains I could see a smiling crowd entirely blocking up the High Street, and as the performance proceeded I could hear the pleasant sound of pennies clinking into the bag as William went the rounds.

By this time the show had settled down into a routine. The second scene was a boxing match in three thrilling rounds between Uncle Joe and the monkey, with the adopted names of Joe Beckett and Siki, the two boxing heroes of the moment. There was never a moment's doubt as to who was to win the fight. The monkey was the idol of the crowd. In the second round he rallies; he bumps Joe's head against the proscenium; he butts him with his head, and finally attacks him with an umbrella, which mischievous tactics so pleased the boys that they began to yell such encouragements as " Goo it, monkey! 'It 'im, monkey! Look out, monkey! The monkey's going to win!" Influenced by these inspiring shouts the boxers became very excited, knocking a good deal of paint off each other,

and Joe Beckett retired, leaving half one of his wooden ears in the village street.

For the third turn John Barleycorn produced his magic chest, which has come from Egypt out of Tutankhamen's tomb. By the incantation of a magic formula it has the power of transmuting old and worthless articles into bags of gold, or diamonds, or something equally precious and desirable. He is a man of the world, this John Barleycorn, and sceptical of this sort of fairy-tale magic; but all the same he thinks he may as well experiment a little, so he puts a bonnet belonging to his wife into the magic chest, and pronounces the ancient Egyptian formula:

I chi chi chikori oni
Nikker Pikker oo,
Nikker Pikker owl
Nikkeraball, a canonball
Chinee Crew.

He opens the box, and is excited to find that a change has been wrought, that in place of the bonnet there is a cheque, or a banknote or something. He pulls out the paper, spreads it on the board to read it, and is disgusted to find that the genii has presented him with the bill for the bonnet which he has neglected to pay. He stuffs the bill back and thinks he will try again. This time he tries his luck with a bell belonging to Pippi, and in return gets a large human sock with a big hole in it. There is nothing very witty or subtle in that idea, I will confess, but all the same it made the people of Porlock laugh, and what effect could a

showman wish for better than that. But John Barleycorn did not laugh; he was disappointed. He thinks, however, a third time may be lucky, and as he has an empty bottle by him, and what is the use of an empty bottle anyway, he puts that into the chest. This time the genii is apparently kinder, and John pulls out of the box an enormous black bottle, which he hugs, kisses, dances with, and drinks from, but in the end is punished for so doing by Mickey, the genii, who pulls him head first into the chest and shuts the lid with a grim snap.

This concluded my part of the show and I then changed places with William, and after waiting a little for a change of audience, his puppets began their performance and I took my turn at the collecting. But first of all I became one of the audience; I tried to imagine myself a native of Porlock and that I had just seen The Peep Show for the first time. That is one of the tragedies of a puppet-showman, after all his hard work he can never see his own performance.

As soon as the puppets appeared, the chattering crowd became quiet and attentive, closing in round the theatre, and this is what we saw.

The old country man and the modern artist begin the scene with a discussion on music. The yokel sings an ancient folk-song which the artist despises as an old thing, a very old song. For his part he has modern tastes; he only sings the very latest thing, and accordingly, in humorous caricature, he sings, "Come into the Garden, Maud," which does not impress the old yokel in the least. The song finished, the yokel thinks he would like his portrait painted,

whereupon the artist produces his easel and canvas, and with a real brush and real ink, actually draws a good portrait of the old man, who, not realising how clever it is for a puppet to draw at all, says it is not a portrait, that, in fact it is nothing at all but a lot of black lines. Naturally this leads to an argument, and then to a fight, which is ended by the old man seizing the canvas and smashing it over the artist's head, so that he finishes up wearing it as a collar.

As I went round with the bag every face was wreathed in smiles at this scene, and I overheard constant remarks, such as, " That's all right, ain't it ! " " Ain't that all right ! " " I never see one like this before," while two men were so impressed by its unusual quality that they supposed we were only doing it " for a bit of fun like." It must have been William who gave rise to that idea; it was either his dignified way of collecting as he strolled round smoking his pipe, or it may have been his new boots which flashed like unblemished gold and had come from Piccadilly, an unusual shopping district for Punch and Judy men.

By this time the town band was assembling and trying its instruments, so we packed up our theatre and felt very much the " real thing " as we retired into the bar of the Castle Hotel to cool our burning throats with a glass of Devon cider. Here we talked with a horsey individual who understood well the requirements of our show, and gave us useful information about the road to Lynmouth and the places at which we could show on the way.

We arrived back at our camp as it was growing dark, with the feeling that we had had quite enough

adventures for one day. It is good fun doing puppet-shows, but after all it is something of an upheaval and a nervous strain for two respectable young men to become travelling showmen, and we were glad to crawl into our dog-kennel of a tent, slip into our sleeping-sacks, and enjoy a sober supper of buns and cocoa. There in the corner of the field we were in snug quarters, but criticised the farmer a good deal who had put us into this stony field instead of the one we had set our hearts on, a soft meadow full of new-mown hay.

As we took our supper we produced our collection bag and wondered how much there was in it. It was a good weight of coin, but would not amount to very much if it was all copper; we were not greedy, but still, we had our living to get. We tipped the bag upside down and searched the coins for silver, but alas! they were all brown ones! We counted them out, arranging them in piles of twelve on a saucepan lid, and found that we had seven shillings and twopence halfpenny. Not a large amount, but sufficient for our simple expenses for the day. One old lady when contributing had held up her penny to William and said, "I've got a penny for you. I've been holding it so long in my hand that it's quite warm."

V

PORLOCK HILL—EXMOOR—THE LORNA DOONE FARM—THREE SHILLINGS AND TENPENCE

PORLOCK is a pretty town below the green hills with its old-fashioned, whitewashed houses, and its gardens bright with cottage flowers. There is some pleasure in doing one's shopping in such a place, and we wandered in and out of shops, packing our bags with provender for which we paid with the actual pennies we had collected. We were very concerned about all these pennies; we thought it essential to get rid of them, that we were suffering from a most unusual and ridiculous weight. Our only plan was to spend them, but after counting out eleven coppers on the counter for a pound of tomatoes and sixteen for a pound of cheese we soon found that we were exchanging our money for something far heavier and far more bulky.

We went out of the town by the natural, steep hill, leaving the toll road of easier gradient to the ridiculous motor-cars. Porlock Hill is one of the longest and steepest in the country; a famous hill, and in ascending it with our show we felt that we were making history. Had a Punch and Judy show ever climbed this road to the high moors before?

About a hundred yards from the first sudden turn of the hill we pulled up to consider the situation. A passing motorist, smiling from among his easy cushions had called out to us, " That looks like hard work," and we soon found ourselves in profound agreement with him. We left The Old Encumbrance tilting in the gutter and walked away with an offended air. In the magnificent view and some cigarettes we sought forgetfulness; after the cigarettes we found it necessary to draw the view in our sketch-books, and after that our rest was prolonged while some huntsmen and a pack of hounds, who all smelt our vehicle, wandered by. Then, in sober mood, but with grim determination, we pulled off our coats, rolled up our sleeves, and were about to put ourselves to the task again when we heard a shout of alarm behind us and saw, on the steep corner of the road below, a motor-car come to a sudden stop.

We ran down the hill immediately to investigate the trouble and found that the car, jibbing at the steep gradient, had begun to run backwards, that the owner was clinging to the brakes, helpless, and that his frightened wife was clinging to him. Having mastered this particular piece of hill ourselves we set about the rescue of the car with superior feelings. William and I, as proper vagrants, have philosophic objections to motor-cars, and we were amused at this ridiculous engine being beaten by the good Exmoor Hill. We blocked the wheels with stones, when the wife descended in a hurry of relief and the engines were set going again. But for all their roaring and blustering and imitation energy they were futile, and it was not until

the two Punch and Judy men had applied their shoulders to the wheel that the thing was reversed and set safely on its way back to find the special motor road. As we stood on either side of the car talking to the driver, he suddenly, amid profuse thanks, flung out both his arms, seized our hands and left in each a shilling. We felt inclined to blush and refuse the tip ; we protested, but the man was away, and after all, were we not men of the road with our livings to get ? We put the shillings in our pockets and credited them to the account of our earnings for the day.

Refreshed by this incident, and with a renewed belief in our powers, we set off again determined to achieve what the car had failed to do. For two steady hours we took it in turns to pull or push, and although we tried a hundred different ways the problem was always the same, each step was a good stiff pull. Luckily it was our constant duty as poets to admire the view, and as artists we had to make a drawing or two; it was simply as hungry men that we took our lunch at noon instead of one o'clock. Our constant thought and conversation was of reducing the outfit, but if we discarded the theatre we should earn no pennies to live on, and if we turned out the camp we would lose our lodgings. The only rejection I could think of was the interesting works of William Shakespeare in one volume, but they were securely packed, and we struggled on with our complete load.

The country became wilder and higher. The hedges disappeared and we trudged an open road with moorland all around us, a moorland thick with heather, bilberry and bracken. At the road to Exford we halted,

brought to a standstill by the immense beauty of our surroundings. We left the gritty road and wandered about the heather trying to approach the wild ponies and foals, but the pretty things tossed their long tails and manes and trotted away from us. We could hardly tear ourselves away from this view of sea, of rolling downs, and the vast stretch of moorland all sombre greens and browns in the grey day. But time was wearing on, and, as we hoped to reach a village where we could earn some pennies, we returned to our task. We drank in the high, keen air, as refreshing as spring water, and despite the hard pulling we progressed buoyantly. At three o'clock, after nearly four hours' pulling, we came to the summit and a sign post, finding ourselves only three miles from Porlock instead of the five which we had imagined. We had thus progressed at about three quarters of a mile an hour.

It was a relief to arrive at the road leading down to Oare and Brendon. It was a further joy to find a notice there stating that it was unsuitable for motor traffic, and that consequently we might expect it to have a natural surface, that it would be free of garages, spirit advertisements, and dumps of rusty old tar barrels. We were not disappointed ; it is a perfect road that runs down to Oare and Brendon and the Doone country, such a road as might have existed for all time, and not a modern, narrow-minded affair, suitable only for machines. This was a free road, a thing of ups and downs, of turns and twists, of banks and hedges ; a road good enough for tramps and pedlars, for poets, for philosophers, a road for us, William and me with our vagrant, gipsy theatre.

We passed a wild wood of dwarfed and rugged pines, and then we hung over a deep moorland valley. We plunged and bumped down the steep road, glad to be done with the uphill work. We splashed through a stream that unceremoniously crossed the road, and at the sight of the clear water we decided to stop and make tea. We followed the little stream till it joined a larger, the Weir Water, and here on the greenest of turf, beneath a graceful young ash tree, by the lively stream that rippled, and gurgled, and splashed its way over the glistening rocks, we made a gipsy fire and brewed our tea. A great, silent Exmoor Hill rose before us ; a lonely hill wooded with old pines, rose behind us, and the road went away down the green valley by the tumbling stream at the foot of all the other round, bare hills. We agreed with the notice at the top of the hill, that motor-cars with their stenches and raucous noises, were most unsuitable for this clean, harmonious place of bright turf and bracken, and the musical waters.

We would have stayed willingly in that place for ever but always the slogan rises before us—We have our living to get !—so we packed up our teapots and pursued our way along the open road that turned and twisted with the torrent. As we approached Oareford, we imagined that it would reveal itself as a delightful little village which would provide us with an audience and some pennies, but on getting there we found only a school which was closed, and two or three cottages without signs of inhabitants. Loveliness there was in abundance, green meadows and trees, and among them the meeting of the two rocky streams, the Weir Water

and the Chalk Water. We decided to push on to Oare which we hoped to find larger, but again we found only a church, a manor house, and a farm, and no sign of an audience. Either place would have been ideal for camping, but we could not think of settling down until we had done our duty as showmen and earned our bread and cheese for the day.

Presently we came to the Lorna Doone Farm where we stopped to buy some milk. The folk here were curious as to what sort of a thing we were pushing about, and on having it all explained to them (they did not know what a Punch and Judy was) a giggling girl suggested a show. They invited us to camp where we liked and promised to find an audience for us within an hour. As it was now getting late we concluded that the gods had arranged this little matter for us, so we put up the tent in a neighbouring field, set up the show outside the Lorna Doone Farm, and arranged some benches in front for the audience. Some thirty country people gathered round us. They carefully avoided the forms which we had arranged, and stood behind them or awkwardly to one side in several odd groups. We could not persuade them to sit down ; I think they were anxious to show they did not take this sort of thing too seriously. Our performance made them all laugh, all, except the baby in arms, who yelled. As for us, coming as it did at the end of a day's stiff pulling, it made us perspire, but we took what consolation we could from the collection which amounted to three shillings and tenpence.

At any rate, we had done our best in this lonely district, so we returned to our tent with clear con-

sciences, and rewarded ourselves by frying eggs and bread steaks for supper. Our travelling frying-pan was a small one, and the eggs and the bread had to be fried in a series one after the other. This prolonged meal was stretched out a good deal further by smoking and conversation. It had turned to a gloomy evening, and after we had got into our sleeping-sacks we opened up the interesting works of William Shakespeare in one volume, and were just going to cheer things up by a reading or two from " King Lear " or " Hamlet," when unfortunately, as if in derision, our last piece of candle guttered out, and we had to settle down to sleep.

Three shillings and tenpence !

I lay in the tent listening to the rain pattering on the thin roof, thinking instead of sleeping. Round and round in my head went fleeting visions of white-washed cottages and steep hills, of glorious views, of bread steaks, of grinning audiences, and of the Lorna Doone Farm ; but through it all, like a refrain, three shillings and tenpence constantly recurred.

William was asleep ; he was not thinking of a miserable three and tenpence. He is only a showman for a week, he travels for pleasure, and that amount could not have much meaning for him. But the rain put thoughts into my head, thoughts of wet days when I would not be able to show and collect any pennies. I could see the possibility of having to live on three and tenpence for a few wet days until I was reduced to a penniless state. But then the sun would shine, I would come to a village, perform in the street, collect another three shillings and tenpence and stroll on a rich and independent man. At such a time three

shillings and tenpence would be a matter of importance, so much bed-rock. Why with that amount I would be able to buy nine loaves of bread! What an armful that would be for a starving man! Or I would be able to buy six loaves, half a pound of cheese, and a pennyworth of onions; or four loaves of bread, half of cheese, half of butter, threepennyworth of tea, and a packet of cigarettes; or two loaves—but I leave you to spend three shillings and tenpence in your own way. For my part I passed half the night devising different expenditures which grew more and more luxurious, until I had cut out the bread for cake, and was finishing up with Saturday night at the pictures.

And after all, three shillings and tenpence was not all that we had earned. We had enjoyed a splendid and healthy summer day's holiday in one of the loveliest parts of England, which costs the usual holiday-maker ten shillings a day at the very least. On the principle of ten shillings saved is ten shillings earned we had added another pound to our exchequer. That is where a wandering showman scores. You serious business people must accumulate holiday expenses by working in some beastly city, but for us showmen the gods have arranged things more sensibly and directly; we get our holiday with our labour.

Rain held us tent-bound until the afternoon of the next day, when we struck camp and set off for Lynmouth with the hope of getting there in time for an evening show. But getting about with a puppet-show is a continual obstacle race of unseen and unexpected obstacles that do not reveal themselves until you are half-way over.

For instance, that afternoon we bought some methylated spirit. The village shop which usually stocked it had none for the time being and sent us on to the garage; but here the chauffeur was away and the spirit under lock and key. These people suggested the carpenter and the cobbler, but we could not find the carpenter and the shoemaker had none, but thought the smith might oblige us. So we searched out the smith who sent us to his private house where he thought his wife had some in a bottle. The idea of a bottle sounded substantial and promising, so we called on Mrs. Blacksmith. In an unguarded moment we admired some whitewash decorations on her window, painted there in place of curtains, and consequently had to hear how the lady's daughter had done them, that she was very artistic and had done all sorts of things like that. And after that we had to hear the history of Mrs. Blacksmith's brother who had been an artist, a London artist, and we must go into the house and see some canvases of his which she had. Finally she produced the bottle of methylated spirit, spent some time in hunting up an old plated wine funnel which proved too large for our tin, so that altogether we took a good hour in obtaining our pennyworth of spirit, for which we had to pay threepence.

After Brendon we found some stiff uphill work where we travelled slowly, and then, after Church Hill, we lost our way. We mounted walls and climbed little hills and trees, trying to spy out the land, but nothing could we discover but Exmoor downs and deep valleys with distant roads running up and down them at cruel gradients. At last we got directions from

a boy who sent us down the Cheriton road, all the way downhill to Lynmouth. We made good going down this winding road overhanging the rushing, tumbling Lynn, but here another obstacle appeared as we looked round in despair for somewhere to camp. In all those acres of wild woodland and heather there was not a level spot where we could pitch our insignificant tent. We searched above the road and below the road, but everywhere, every yard of the ground had an impossible tilt to it. All we could find was a bay blasted from the cliff by the road workers for their store of metal and tar. We made a note of that as a last resource, and then along with all the chars-à-bancs, cars, and tourists, we found ourselves wandering into the town. We abandoned The Old Encumbrance in the High Street by a chapel, and began to make inquiries for a pitch. One suggested the road over the moors to Minehead, and another the beach, but we shivered at the steep hill to Minehead, and the beach proved an impossible place of publicity, shingle and boulders. We pulled ourselves together over a late tea at The Rising Sun Inn, and set out again on our ridiculous search for a piece of flat ground about three yards square.

If unexpected obstacles appeared in our way we also encountered unexpected assistance, and, just as last evening a kitchen girl had settled us into a camp and a show, so this evening a boy was the instrument of our deliverance. As if he had read our thoughts he came up to us and said:

"There's a good place to camp along the path past the houses; a nice flat place it is with spring water, where the Boy Scouts camped last year."

Our boy, who, no doubt, was in search of an entertaining evening, offered to guide us to the place. We were not long in recovering The Old Encumbrance from the kind protection of the chapel, and pulling it over the bridge which crosses the Lynn, we set out down the path on the banks of the river which leads to the Watersmeet. This was a terrifying journey of bumps, and lurches, and entanglements in overhanging trees, but as our original boy had developed into half a dozen, there were plenty of willing hands to lift us round the difficult corners, and to support us against being tipped into the torrent.

With strident cries from the boys of " Here you are, sir ! " " This is the place, sir ! " we pulled up on a lovely green glade, surrounded by trees and bushes, hidden away from the hotels and boarding-houses. I can tell you all our troubles vanished then. Not even the news of big adders being there disturbed us. We dispatched the boys with a tip, and in restful mood calmly set our camp in this wild, woodland place. And what a place ! with the towering rocks of the ravine above us, the groves of trees around, and the River Lynn among its rocks, murmuring, murmuring by.

After supper, as night fell, we sat on the rocks in midstream and played our whistle-pipes to the accompaniment of the waters. Had our surroundings not been so distracting or had the evening only been a little longer, so poetic were our thoughts and so great our emotion, we might, had it not been fated otherwise, have unpacked at last those interesting works of William Shakespeare in one volume.

VI

LYNTON AND LYNMOUTH—FAREWELL TO WILLIAM—BANKRUPT—TURNED OFF PITCH—FRIENDLY BOATMEN—LYNBRIDGE

THERE have been times when we would have looked at Lynmouth as something to admire and enjoy and have been pleasantly thrilled to find it trying to imitate Chamonix with its tea balconies over the rocky streams, but now, with our living to get we looked upon the picturesque little town with a sinister intent. We did not study the different boarding-houses and hotels, or worry about the holiday fashions, but we came out of the woods like wild men, and watched our crowd with a professional eye.

We found them far from satisfactory. These holiday-makers would not keep still and they would not move altogether. While a few walked on the promenade, some strolled on the beach; while some went about their shopping, others took the cliff railway up to Lynton. Other parties went away from the town in chars-à-bancs, and others with rucksacks on their backs set off to trudge the moors. There seemed to be no crying need for a puppet-show; it all looked as if the life of Lynmouth would have managed to get on quite well without one!

But a showman would soon starve if he thought like that about the world. If Lynmouth was so self-satisfied as to think itself complete and perfect it was for us to force a way in, and for our puppets to behave in such a delightful and attractive manner as to make themselves indispensable. Inspired with this intent, we packed up the show after lunch and negotiated the difficult path back to the town. It was not long before some children joined us, and we all clattered through the streets to the promenade, where we set up our " castello " before the two old lime-kilns. Some people were interested in our proceedings at once, and very properly took up their seats on the promenade wall, while a row of children settled on the kerbstone. William blew his trumpet and I disappeared into the theatre to work the puppets. After all, there was quite a stir of excitement at our appearance in Lynmouth, and our coming seemed to be the right and inevitable thing.

The performance started smoothly and the audience began to laugh, but was suddenly sent scattering by an enormous char-à-bancs. This beast took up its stand six yards away and the puppets had to struggle against its roarings and pantings. The crowd came together again in the roadway and the performance continued. Bang ! Whizz ! Crash ! The beast, having discharged its load, turned round, made a fresh charge through our crowd, and roared away down the High Street. Feeling that we were at the end of this interruption we went on with renewed vigour, but alas! it was not long before a similar Behemoth turned the corner rattling and roaring its clumsy way through our affairs. With

a third and fourth attack the truth was forced unpleasantly upon us; we had taken up our stand at the starting and returning point of all the motor and char-à-bancs trips.

There was such a racket that I could not keep in contact with the audience, and shut up in the curtains I felt like a mad showman performing to myself amid a wild uproar of mad motor-cars. They passed and repassed continually, and hooted and grated all their brakes in a frenzy of derision. It was a dismal business to be shouting out silly jokes into the nowhere for no one to laugh at, and it was only that I heard an occasional clink of pennies passing into William's hat that I kept going. We mended matters a little and amused the children vastly by carrying the theatre bodily to the other side of the road where, with the cars passing behind us, we contrived to perform until all the people had gone in to dinner.

Considerably dazed by this noisy experience we returned with relief to the sanity and the almighty quietness of the ravine. Like a couple of brigands we sat on either side of a rock in this romantic glen, eating our supper and counting our spoils. This had been our record collection, a matter of eight shillings and fourpence. It was also our last joint show, for the next day William, much to his regret, was returning to the respectable life.

Perhaps he was a little consoled that evening as we prepared ourselves and the minute tent for sleeping. As we did it all in a sitting posture or on all fours he may have looked forward to his spacious bedroom and bathroom. There is no room for pillow fights or any

slap-dash work when your bedchamber for two only measures six feet in length, four feet in width, and three feet six inches in height. We had to behave with meticulous care, we picked our way like cats. We were rather amused with ourselves out there in the wild ravine, to compare our quarters with the civilised hotels and boarding-houses only a hundred yards away. There just round the corner everyone would be going to bed in spacious comfort. Even their beds alone would take up more space than our whole house. They could walk about, they could brush their hair with flourishes, they could stand up and put on their pyjamas, there was room to pull one's shirt off there. But while the toffs were enjoying themselves in the hotels we were having a tough time; after I had hit William on the nose, and William had stuck his anatomy into the tent and nearly brought the whole tabernacle down, we had an argument, and then a demonstration as to whether it was safer to don our pyjamas in a sitting, a kneeling, or a reclining position. If the hotels were more spacious our little tent was certainly more amusing.

Should this catch the eye of any Punch and Judy man in need of help I can recommend William as a first-rate companion. A good, sturdy puller, a cheerful comrade, and an unflinching collector; his puppets will amuse and interest anyone, anywhere, at any time, and on the basis of our earnings for this week there is no doubt that he is worth every bit of his share of the proceedings, which was thirteen shillings and sevenpence halfpenny.

So here was the end of our week's venture on the

road. We had travelled on foot, and by train and steamer from the Cotswolds to Devonshire ; we had slept on the edge of the Cotswolds, on the heights over Bristol, by the sea in lovely Porlock Bay, in a field on Exmoor, which had probably been ploughed up by the "girt Jan Ridd," and we finished up with an ideal camp on the banks of the famous River Lynn. We were as brown as berries and our appetites were enormous ; we were charmed with our experiences, but we were not proud of our accounts.

Our expenditure had been three pounds fourteen shillings and eightpence halfpenny, whilst our takings for five shows, together with two shillings for saving the life of a motorist, amounted only to one pound seven shillings and threepence. Financially this was a catastrophe, bankruptcy in fact for a man with his living to get. In future there would be no more jaunts on steamships, or bottles of ginger-pop, or tea with jam and Devonshire cream in elegant tea shops. From now onwards the showman must settle down to the job in grim earnest, show here, there and everywhere, live upon his takings and clear off his debts.

By seven-thirty the next morning William and the works of William Shakespeare in one volume were away, and I was left down in Lynmouth cut off from everywhere by sensational hills. But there was a practical aspect about Lynton which persuaded me to try and stay until the next week. I hoped for a few shillings each day on the promenade, and there were several jobs I wanted to do. For one thing I wished to take advantage of the River Lynn, it was such an excellent bathroom and wash-house. In a few days I could

get a good clean up and prepare for travelling on again to new worlds and new adventures.

But that afternoon when I, The Peep Show, and a group of noisy children arrived on the promenade, a large policeman was very much in evidence. He fixed a stern eye upon me as I came up the road which mesmerised me into leaning over the promenade wall by his side and discussing the possibilities of performing. He told me that it was not for him to give me permission to perform; all he could do was to stop me. At the same time he was evidently distressed at having to prevent a fellow mortal from making his living, and the good chap proceeded to outline a method of procedure. The thing for me to do was to apply to the Town Council which met once a month. If I could not wait so long as that perhaps the Chairman would be able to fix it up for me. The Council was meeting that very moment up in Lynton, and if I waited where I was I would see the Chairman coming down the cliff railway, as he always did after a meeting, to get to his house in Lynmouth.

The constable introduced me and my affair to a man who was hanging about and left us. So I and the man leaned on the wall, chatted, and waited. A marvellous affair and a mystery, this idle man, who leant himself so easily to my business. In about an hour's time the unsuspecting Chairman was pointed out to me as he left the station, and further he was recommended as a gentleman—a real gentleman. So, trembling in my boots, I stopped the Chairman in his comfortable reflective-looking progress, and explained to him that I would like to do a sort of Punch and Judy show there for a few days.

"Well! Hum! Yes!" He looked at his boots, knocked a stone with his stick, and looked at me again.

I said it was a very good show, quite a special affair, and would really be quite an honour to Lynmouth. This seemed to amuse him and his eyes twinkled.

"Well! Hum! Yes! I will give you permission. You can do it there," and he pointed to the little garden between the café and the lime-kilns.

"But mind this, you must not interfere with the musicians down the promenade there. They pay a rent to perform every evening, and I can't have you interfering with their business."

I solemnly promised that the trio should be free of my competition, which seemed to amuse him still further, for he chuckled, pinched my arm jovially, and said:

"Well, if you make a lot of money you can pay us a big rent for your pitch."

I said that nothing would give me more pleasure than to be in a position to pay an enormous rent.

"Ha! Ha! Well! Hum! That's all right! Yes! Well, you can do your show there for this week."

He shook hands with me, this real gentleman, a deed which was witnessed by all the chauffeurs, the boatmen, and the odd townspeople round about, who from that moment treated me as a friend and a brother.

I put up the show at once and got to work. This was my first attempt to perform and collect by myself in the street, and all I could do was to gather a crowd by showing for a little, and then frighten them all away by going out with the hat. I was consoled by a friendly old couple who described to me the mean people who

ran away when I appeared; they even pointed out the actual people very indignantly and wanted me to run down the road after them. I continued these exasperating tactics until the dinner-hour and then retired with three shillings.

A new difficulty confronted me the next day. A large gentleman in tweeds stopped me in the town and wanted to know " Oo 'ad said I could pitch my tent by the river." When I explained the part which the boys had played in the matter, his eyes nearly came out of his head, and he uttered the one word " Boys " in an explosion of contempt. I stood up for the boys and commended their hospitable and Christian conduct, but he was as immovable as a rhinoceros, this stout florid man, and the upshot of our conversation was that I would have to go; that he was keeper of the river and responsible for the fishing, and that if I didn't move, take myself off quickly, he would soon find means of shifting me.

So that evening, after the show, the kind owners of the cloakroom in the town allowed me to leave The Old Encumbrance in their back garden. To be exact I piled up the pieces on top of their chicken run much to the consternation of the chickens. Then with the sleeping-sack and ground-sheet in the rucksack I set off to explore for a new pitch and to spend the fine night entirely in the open.

But what a ridiculous place for a camper this Lynmouth is ! For all my searching I only found a sloping bed on the heather on the open hillside, which tormented me with dreams about rolling down into the abyss beneath. At three o'clock in the dim moonlight

I tucked the bed under my arm and struggled back to the original pitch to finish off my sleep there.

I had already been well treated by several " good sorts " in this Devonshire, and now the boatmen had recommended another to me in the shape of Phil Jones, a farmer who lived on the Barnstaple road about half an hour out of Lynton, and who according to them would be sure to let me camp. So on the Saturday evening The Peep Show went up the cliff railway to Lynton and set out to find this hospitable man. He was away for the day, but his wife made no difficulties about the matter, and I settled down on a delightful little lawn among some gorse bushes by the side of a stream, a clear, tumbling affair of rocks, and pools, and waterfalls. And there I remained, for the next day Mr. Jones came along to have a look at me and discovered that I was not camping on his ground but on his neighbour's, so he made no objections to me remaining where I was.

On both Monday and Tuesday afternoons the puppets performed again on the promenade, and each day I secured my bread and cheese. With the Chairman's permission to perform and the charming camp on the Barnstaple road I began to feel at home. There was a friendliness about the people there which made my stay a pleasant holiday. All the children knew me, and I could not get through the town without a dozen young friends attaching themselves to The Peep Show man. The boatmen, who seemed to be doing very little boating, were glad of the diversion, and every afternoon at least a dozen would sit on the wall, in a blue jerseyed row, and watch the show. When I refused

to collect from these old friends one of them went along the row with his hat and brought me the pennies he had collected. They discussed me up and down in true village parliamentary fashion, and the good opinion of these frank, sturdy men of the sea sustained me considerably in the practice of this new profession. The Peep Show had won their hearts and they wanted me to stay all the summer. They swore fiercely at the officious man who had shifted me from the original camp by the Lynn, sending him to the devil, urging me to defy him by going back again. They laughed at my pact with the Chairman, and incited me to knock out the promenade orchestra by performing when they played and getting their audience from them. The puppets were a mystery to them; they imagined them full of springs, that I " threw " my voice, that the theatre was full of mechanism, and they made me blush by saying in their bluff, seamanlike way that it was a dashed clever show for one dashed man to do all by his own dashed self. What they liked best was " that there bit aboot the parson having his boxing lesson."

During these days I was able to develop the performance a little, to experiment with some new scenes and introduce some new properties. Besides that famous volume of Shakespeare which William had brought to read in his quiet moments, he had brought also a piece of wood out of which he was going to carve a wooden spoon in his other quiet moments. The Shakespeare he took away with him unopened, and this piece of wood he left behind untouched. One morning I had carved a demon from this embryo wooden spoon, painted it green, and, by sacrificing

all my darning wool, had provided it with a shock of waving hair. This ferocious mixture of wooden spoon and darning wool had now become the genii of the magic chest, and always finished up that scene with a terrific combat with John Barleycorn.

The boatmen were not the only patrons from whom I gathered flattering remarks as well as pennies, and after these two weeks of showmanship I was beginning to feel assured that it was possible, even in this clever, scientific, mechanical, superb age, to amuse both the sophisticated and the unsophisticated with a simple puppet-show. There are of course a number of delightful people in the world, such as myself, who as soon as you mention puppets to them will go off in a series of extravagant exclamations such as "How charming! Wonderful! So quaint!" and the like; but here in the street were people who had no special prejudice for things old-fashioned and artistic. These took the show at its face value, as a lively affair which made one couple miss their train up to Lynton, which made one man put sixpence in the hat and say, "A penny! Why, you're a clever fellow you know, that's clever work!" and another man to remark that that made sevenpence which I had got out of him, he having already given a penny to his two children three times to see the show. I admired the people who could speak out their minds like this; it was a good lesson to me in nice manners, these agreeable remarks, and in future may I never hesitate to speak my appreciation to those marvellous street performers one sometimes sees, such as the man who plays Wagner on two tin whistles, or the genius who plays Italian opera on a

Japanese fiddle made from a rusty, dented tin, and a bent hazel stick.

On my way back to the camp on the Tuesday evening I found myself walking level with a young mother pushing a perambulator. We entered into conversation during which she suggested that I should do a show in her village of Lynbridge. I pleaded tiredness, at which she was very scornful.

"Tired," she said, "what! tired with pulling a little thing like that up a hill—you do we a show, come, us warnts to see it, we'em heard so much about it."

I succumbed to that tyrant Fame, as the saying goes, and rigged up the theatre in a court between the cottages. The young woman, two or three other mothers, and some children, got very excited and went off with shouts and laughter to rouse the rest of the village, which was simply a row of a dozen cottages. A mixed audience of about thirty gathered round. They listened very attentively, silenced the children, chased away a barking dog, and remonstrated with a young woman who laughed too loud and long. They all laughed a good deal, and they rounded off each turn very satisfactorily with applause. When I had finished I gave them my hat to make a collection which they took readily enough, and returned to me containing three shillings and sevenpence halfpenny.

There was a good deal of friendly banter while I was packing up. They knew all about my little tent down the road. Wouldn't I like someone to sleep with me for company like ? Wouldn't I like someone to help pull the truck along ? I must be lonely—I ought to have someone with me—I ought to have a

Judy! By this time several of them had seized a struggling girl and pulled her up to me; but, as soon as they let go, she disappeared with shrieks into one of the houses, and The Peep Show fled for its life back to the camp.

But three little girls, very excited, came running along and accompanied me. They longed to come over the river and see the tent, but the stepping stones were too far apart for their short strides. They stood debating how to get over them when suddenly, the boldest, with quite a wild shout, walked deliberately up to her knees through the water. The other two urchins, equally excited, with cheeks flushed and eyes flashing, with more shouts soon followed her. They nearly danced with excitement when they found knives and forks, and pots and pans in the tent.

"Ain't it nice—it's proper, ain't it!" they repeated continually and with such glowing eyes that they increased my pride of ownership. They seemed unable to tear themselves away, but eventually as it grew dark they set off for the village very reluctantly, wading through the river again. I waited about rather nervously for some time half expecting a visit from some angry parents who would want to know what I meant by making their children get their shoes and stockings so wet, but no, I was left undisturbed to sleep the night calmly away on the green turf by the rippling brook.

VII

WANDERING—PARRACOMBE—THE GREAT PROFESSOR SMITH

IN grey weather, and feeling almost melancholy at leaving friendly Lynmouth, I turned inland and set off the next morning towards Barnstaple. There was no necessity or particular reason for going there, but it was plain that Lynton and Lynmouth was not a suitable pitch in which to make a longer stay. For one thing, it seemed so cut off from the rest of the world, and for another I had to camp so far away from the scene of action.

During the week I had collected one pound sixteen shillings and twopence halfpenny. Later in the season, with more visitors, collections would have improved, but against that there would have arisen the question of rent and the engagement of a collector.

But besides making its fortune, The Peep Show had other ambitions to consider; it was to travel, to see the world, and to gain experience both for itself as a show and for its showman as a man. It was not to settle down and grow sleek on thirty shillings a week, but to get lively and interesting by encountering always fresh conditions and new audiences. So the showman looked at his map, admired the road to Barnstaple, decided upon going there and showing at Parracombe and Bratton Fleming on the way.

I trundled along between the hedges for a mile or so, buying milk from a farm, bread from a shop, and paraffin from a garage, and I was just settling down to enjoy the rural beauties of a greener Devonshire as a change from the rocky glens and seascapes of Lynmouth, when I found my thoughts diverted and concentrated upon the task of getting The Old Encumbrance up that good Devonshire hill, Dean Steep.

To the holiday-maker walking from hotel to hotel, hills may be picturesque and add a piquancy to his travels, but as I zigzagged up Dean Steep with frequent halts I found myself engaged in a grim struggle with this beautiful Nature. She was offering a weighty resistance to the progress of The Peep Show. Every yard was a stiff tug against her powers, and it was not until I stood in triumph on the summit of Dean Steep, eighteen hundred feet above sea-level, that I was at liberty to admire and worship her. Then I sat on the roadside wall, and, with the help of a cigarette, enjoyed a vast and sombre panorama of Exmoor hills and valleys over which grey mists were rolling.

All the morning the road went up and down through this lonely world on the edge of the moor. The rare farms stood wide apart in the sparse country, and over them, against the sky ran the dark undulations of Exmoor. I met no one to talk to and no one to look at. I was alone with the fields, with the wild birds, with a great stormy sky and the wind; but I was not lonely, for it seemed to me that all these things were alive and that I was part of them and they part of me; they seemed great companions immense with life and purpose. And as I and the show trundled along

together in this free way I dared to think of greater things than puppets, of those mysterious reasons which had sent me on the road as a vagabond. I remembered how as a schoolboy I had read Morris' *News from Nowhere* and how I was so fascinated by it and so drawn into it, that ever since I have always more or less wandered in that Utopia of artistic work and fine weather. As boys of past ages have been inspired to run away to sea and seek El Dorado, so was I inspired to run away from all the ugly mess of machinery and commercialism and look for Utopia. Which is a very proper impulse in these days when all the unknown lands seemed to be discovered, when the only discoveries we can make are in new ways of living. And on this morning at least I was content to think that I had discovered some sort of a Utopia. I was ridiculously happy in shoving my show along this country road. I was happy—and who can be happier than that.

I lunched in a pleasant meadow bright with buttercups and purple clover, with tall bunches of green reeds shaking their feathery crests; a flock of unbelievably white geese wandered about entertaining me with their irresponsible doings while the air was lively with the circling and crying peewits. Although it was raining a little I would not at that moment have changed my clean, fresh restaurant for all the marble and carpeted affairs of Paris, New York and London.

In the afternoon, ready for some company after the lonely morning, I walked into Parracombe and the first person I encountered was a retired old gentleman taking a stroll. His eyes sparkled at the sight of a Punch and Judy show, and he hoped that I would stop

and give them a turn. Parracombe is a real Devonshire village, with its pretty cottages running steeply down the hill to the old-fashioned hotel and its stable yards. In the centre of the street is a little cobbled square, and a real mixed-up village shop and post office combined. I spoke to every one I met about a camping site and about a performance, and acting upon advice thus gathered I knocked at the hotel door which was opened by a boy. To my terror he went off to awaken the landlord who was taking his afternoon nap, and I trembled to think of his rage at being disturbed by a ragged, itinerant Punch and Judy man. But there is a magic charm about Mr. Punch, and, when the proprietor of the hotel appeared, he was actually smiling at the good news. He at once gave me permission to camp in his fields, and on his own initiative urged me to perform in front of his establishment in the evening.

" I haven't seen a Punch and Judy show for years," he said. " I remember old Professor Smith of Bristol who used to perform on Ilfracombe beach. Dear old Professor Smith, he was the best showman in all the West Country. Ah! he did do it well. I saw his show hundreds of times as a boy. I shall never, never forget him, and I always laugh to myself when I think of his little figures."

He repeated his suggestion to perform before his hotel, and I did not hesitate to fall in with this arrangement. I bought some food in the shop and took care to tell the postmistress that there would be a show in the evening as I imagined she would prove a good advertising agent. Then I pulled up the lane to the hotel field and settled down in a delightful corner to

enjoy a comfortable tea. I took great pains to set the tent squarely and laid out my little belongings to make the interior as furnished and homely as possible; and I was just congratulating myself upon having things so well arranged when, outside the tent, I heard footsteps coming through the grass and a sudden hoarse voice exclaim:

"Hoa! What are you doing then!"

I poked my head out of the tent and found a grim old countryman sternly inspecting the encampment and the truck.

"Hoa! What are you doing then!" he exclaimed again.

"I'm doing a Punch and Judy show," I said.

"A Punch and Judy show! But what are you doing in here then?"

"I'm going to sleep here to-night; the landlord of the hotel said I could camp here."

"But! Hoa!" he returned, "this field doan't belong to the hotel."

I soon found that I had pulled in at the wrong gate, that the old man did not want me in his field, being afraid of his landlord, and that there was nothing to do but dismantle the tent and set it up again in the next field. All the same, the grim old chap made his amends when he said I must do the show in the village, and that if I did not do it too early he would come along and see it.

After tea I trundled the show round the village advertising the performance to begin in an hour's time, and finally put it up opposite the White Hart Hotel in a wide stable yard opening off the street. The children came round at once and clamoured for

me to begin immediately, but, for their cheek, I sent them off to get some pennies and to tell their parents to come along. In half an hour a fair crowd had assembled, some of which were bold enough to stand in the stable yard quite near the theatre, but the shy portion stood under the hotel across the road and was frequently cut off by passing cars. After the collection, which felt quite heavy in the bag, and feeling flattered because the landlord had said that I was as good as Professor Smith, I presented them with another turn which they all stayed to see, and as I was packing up, one of the audience brought some more pennies which he had collected for me.

I was interested to find the landlord comparing me favourably with the famous Professor Smith. The traditional Punch and Judy drama has taken a romantic hold upon the affections of the people, and it seemed to me no light task to put up a new and original show as a rival to this time-honoured performance which has been moulded, developed, and perfected in the hands of thousands of clever showmen all the world over.

It was altogether a pleasant experience to set up the show in this simple way. I always have an uncomfortable feeling that I am walking into a sort of private concern when I enter a small village where nearly all the inhabitants are related or at least must have a very intimate knowledge of one another. This evening before the show the audience had looked at me searchingly; they had made me feel a stranger; they were all Tom and Bill and Harry to one another, but they addressed me as Mister. However, after the show I was surrounded by a friendly circle all talking at

once, and as I pulled off to the camp it was reassuring to hear their invitations to come again.

In the lane I encountered the third old man of Parracombe. He was a bent and twisted labourer, so old that he seemed to have forgotten all about this world as he hobbled along, pipe in mouth, his eyes absorbed in the roadway. But he stopped as we met, surveyed my affair coolly from under his shaggy eyebrows, and asked what I might be doing if I would excuse his asking.

At the very mention of Punch and Judy, this old chap, so like a piece of carved mahogany, began to tremble.

" What, a Punch and Judy ! You going tew dew it now ? You going tew dew it in the village ? "

His wooden limbs were galvanised with life and his old eyes illuminated with a lively anticipation.

I explained that I had just performed and was going away. An awful shade of disappointment crossed his face, and he looked at me fiercely. He tottered a step or two nearer, pulled his pipe from his mouth, and spat vehemently, disgustedly upon the ground.

" What, just finished ! Noa ! Dang it arll ! I wish I'd 'ad knowed. Dang it ! Nobuddy towld I aboot it ! Dang it ! If I'd 'ad knowed—I'd ud been there ! "

It was my turn now to be disappointed. If it had not been growing dark and if I had not been so exhausted, I would have done a show for him there in the lane in response to the feeling which he displayed. It was the one cloud on the proceedings at Parracombe that this silly old enthusiast for Punch and Judy had not been in the audience.

VIII

CHARS-À-BANCS—COMBE MARTIN—I TURN GENTLEMAN —SHOW IN TOWN HALL— CRIED BY THE TOWN CRIER —ILFRACOMBE AND PROFESSOR SMITH

I AWOKE next morning to fine weather, and packing up my house and theatre took the road again as a matter of course. With two weeks' experience and collections behind me, with the experiment of travelling to a village, doing a show, and getting away with six shillings so successfully carried through, I wandered along in holiday mood.

There are so many villages in the world like Parracombe, containing friendly people and a few pennies, that I was fast coming to the conclusion that there was room in the world for me and The Peep Show. What Parracombe had done I had every reason to believe the next place, Bratton Fleming, would do; but such are the fortunes of the road that to this day I have never set eyes on that town. About the middle of the morning I came to an exciting spot, a junction of five roads and five importunate signboards ordering me this way and that. Of course I read all the signboards and looked at all the roads, with the result that the

Fates drew me away from Bratton Fleming and led me down the broad highway to Combe Martin, four miles away.

I got a mile of stiff pulling for so changing my mind, but from the top of the hill I could see below me Combe Martin and the blue sea-bay beyond, with the road running down through the country, down, down, all the way down for three miles. It was so easy to saunter along this gentle descent in the fine morning that my mind began to wander in pleasant dreams, and I might have become the medium for who knows what romances and inspired poems had it not been for the frequent uproar, turmoil, earthquakings, and general chaos of the world and all that therein is caused by the passing chars-à-bancs.

Chars-à-bancs! I defy anyone to say a good word for them! I wondered how people could waste their money on lumbering about in the ugly, oversized monstrosities, but I suppose it is because they cost money that holiday people enjoy them. It is something upon which they can splash their savings, and experience for one brief hour the discomforts of affluence, the misery of being rich. But I wish they would stick to the steamers or flying machines for their exhilarations and leave the roads in peace for decent things like Punch and Judy shows.

Chars-à-bancs! The Monsters!

One after another the inelegant vulgarities tear down the lovely Devonshire roads until all the wayside grass, the delicate flowers, the blue scabious, the foxglove, the clover, and the wild strawberries are powdered and reduced to one grey colour by dust. What good effect

is there that these enormities can have upon human beings? Will our hearing be improved by their disgusting blares and screeches, those diabolical warning shrieks, those awful voices which express so vividly their inherent beastliness? Will our lads be the handsomer and stronger, or our lasses become more lovely and graceful for being boodled about in these mechanical mammoths, more ferocious and more perilous to the human race then their animal forbears?

Chars-à-bancs are the most extravagant . . .

Suddenly I was in Combe Martin, all among the whitewashed cottages, staring up at a large advertisement and reading the programme of a week's activities by the townspeople in aid of some hospital. Every day there was to be a dance, or a bazaar, or a competition, and frequently local ladies would play barrel-organs round the district. Now if I performed in the town I felt that I should be robbing the charity of its pennies, or that the charity would get all the pennies and I would perform in vain. Now here was a problem! The philanthropic ladies were encroaching upon and exhausting my means of livelihood, and if I did not enter into rivalry with their street amusements and pass my hat round I might at some future date be forced to deplete the charity by seeking its assistance. In the end I interviewed the Committee of Management to see if they could not employ me to attract and amuse a crowd from which they would collect and pay me a proportion of the proceeds. The idea was received favourably, and it was arranged that on the next afternoon I should do a show for the children at a small charge in the Town Hall.

Here was a sudden accession of dignity! To perform in a Town Hall!

I procured a pitch at a farm just outside the town, half-way up the hilly road which leads to Ilfracombe. With a performance arranged and the encampment set up I was a free man for a few hours, and it was not long before I was swimming in the sea along with all the holiday-makers.

The idea of performing in the Town Hall so worked upon me that I soon began to feel a flourishing and successful showman, and actually purchased a two-penny packet of five Woodbine cigarettes which I spent the evening in smoking on the promenade. Here, leaning over the high parapet, I looked down on the pearly waters of the bay, the white boats moving lazily on their moorings, and the white breakers round the rocky coast. The sun went down red and gold against a green sky, and we all leaned on the parapet transfixed by its beauty. This was a novel experience to spend the twilight hours cheek by jowl with other folk.

I wanted to make the most of this opportunity and I looked round for someone to converse with. To my right an elegant couple immaculate from the toilet table came to a stop, resting their delicate finger-tips on the wall. They gazed out to the sea in all its immensity and to the heavens in all their glory, but all the slim blazer and flannels could ejaculate was :

" Awfully jolly nate."

" Perfectly sweet," returned the jumper and skirt. " Oh, and do you know that in that shop at Ilfracombe I saw some of those . . ."

Ironically, but mercifully, a fierce wave as it crashed and roared its way over the rocks below, cut into this conversation. By the time the rude wave was quiet, the couple had turned their backs on the sea, and blazer and flannels was sucking a pipe and solemnly descanting upon motor-cycles. This was too much for Miss Jumper and Skirt, who suddenly began to swing his arm, and so lured him away with smiles into the evening.

After this pantomime I commenced another Woodbine cigarette and while I was wondering if it was charged with pepper, I became aware of a sterner conversation away on my right. Two rugged and sunburnt plebeians were leaning over the parapet, smoking clay pipes. They were gazing fixedly at the last of the sunset which seemed to be inspiring them to pour forth an ardent political faith.

" I know lots of Liberals that wouldn't vote because you see they know it's no good. You can't understand politics these days and the papers don't tell you the truth. I reckon there'll be a Labour man put up for Barnstaple next time and I'm danged if I doan't vote for 'e too if there is."

Uttered in the broad dialect with a crescendo of emotion these words attained a significance and interest never to be found in political literature. I edged a little nearer. In the clay pipe of proletarian number two the tobacco began to blaze; a spark flew out into the dusk and the man began to growl:

" And this 'ere candidate what's putting up. He's got a big place outside Barnstaple, you know, and I reckon he have too much of his own to look after to keep him from worrying about the likes o' we."

" Ah," said number one, and both the pipes blazed together.

As the night came down and the waves broke over the rocks, the two men continued to growl out criticisms of politics, of society, and of war. The deep voices in a sort of double poem delivered blow upon blow, and as I listened it seemed to me that these proletarian thoughts were a genuine and mighty force of nature. The two men found themselves in such good agreement that they proposed to round off the evening with a drink. They rolled on to their feet, and as they made for the town I heard one of them in a deep voice and broad accent begin on, " This 'ere Prince of Wales."

With the last of the cigarettes I got into conversation with a man, or rather with a dark figure, presumably a man also leaning on the wall. Our conversation was not remarkable until he burst out into a surprising enthusiasm for puppet-shows.

" I think they are very clever things and I am sorry to miss your show. I would go miles to see one anywhere. I love them. And I say, you know, you are lucky to be able to live like that. I shall think of you when I get gack into the City, where unfortunately I have to spend my days."

The five Woodbines were finished and the promenade deserted, so I stumbled across the dark farm to my tent to turn in, only to be turned out again at one o'clock in the morning by an ominous sound of approaching thunder. I got up to pull the fly sheet over the tent when you might have seen me by the lightning flashes skipping round the tent in my nightshirt trying to get the sheet fixed before the rain came, and

vainly attempting to avoid the thistles with my naked feet.

The puppets behaved well in the Town Hall and romped through a good hour's show, making the children laugh and shout, and the Committee anxious to arrange another performance for a larger audience. I never knew such heat as we managed to generate in that Hall on the hot afternoon, and for the future I thought I could very well forgo the honour of performing in Town Halls and content myself with pitches out of doors.

The next day was to be the children's effort in aid of the hospital. In fancy dress they were to parade round the town with collecting boxes, which procession was to finish up on the heights of the promenade, where, it had been arranged, The Peep Show should exhibit itself to the children and to anyone else who liked to come. For this occasion The Peep Show achieved the dignity of being advertised on large placards, and as for The Peep Show man he was promoted from this low-down title and cried round the town by the Town Crier as Mr. Wilkinson from London.

I erected the show early in the evening and announced the time of the performance to all the passers-by. About eight o'clock a wild, chaotic sound of revelry came up from the town below, and through the green bushes I could see the gay procession of children coming up the hill. They played whistle-pipes, blew trumpets, whirled wooden rattles, shouted and sang. They swung up the hill at an excited pace, waving paper streamers and coloured air balloons which

bobbled about gaily. This I felt was the right kind of audience, and I took off my coat, rolled up my shirt-sleeves, determined to make things hum. The children settled down before the show with great eagerness, and in a little while the promenade was crowded with townspeople and visitors. We were a gay crowd when I came out during the interval with a minute Harlequin and Columbine, a pierrot or two, and a gipsy and a Charlie Chaplin going round with the collecting boxes.

I felt mightily pleased with myself after this show ; this was the real thing to get a large crowd of adults and children into a cheerful mood and send them off laughing and chatting about the performance. What better job could a man have than to attract these people together on that high promenade above the sea, and there in the fresh air of a glorious evening amuse them, and make them laugh with a simple, pretty show. Here was a theatre cheap and healthy. All could watch the performance and those who could pay could contribute according to their means and their generosity. All honour to Punch and Judys, to street musicians, to out-of-door pierrots—for in that moment I knew it—they are great institutions, worthy of respect, of being done well, of being encouraged.

My encouragement amounted to a supper, thirty shillings in payment of the two shows, and this remark:

" Every bit as good, if not better than anything Professor Smith ever did."

Again I was compared to the great Smith, and I was urged to apply for his old pitch on Ilfracombe

beach which was now vacant owing to his death some two years ago. This was so much music in my ears to find myself unmistakably compared with " the real thing." If I was compared with Professor Smith, then The Peep Show could be compared to the Punch and Judy Show. A thrill of pride went through me as I imagined my puppets drawing alongside the immortal and villainous old Punch.

But on the Sunday morning, perched on the side of a cliff, as I sat among the bracken and hazels looking down into a rocky sea bay filling with green water, I could only feel that Ilfracombe was too business-like a place for me. It would be difficult to find green bracken and little nut trees in Ilfracombe; it has such a determination to expand, to develop and to be grand, that even the magnificence of the sea dwindles before this " Will to Success." All the same, after a while when I grew tired of this green bower above the sea, I set off to walk along the cliffs to that town, to indulge in a little idle speculation on the subject.

The nearer I got to this gay place the lower my spirits sank. The hard pavements and iron railings, the dismal rows of closed shops, and all the private houses in all their long rows weighed down on my gipsy spirit. But I progressed sternly to the centre of the town and walked through the Arcade, a riot of flash fashions, a menagerie of hats, jumpers, plus-fours, and millinery. With all my inclinations going backward but my legs going forward, I got as far as the Promenade, and when I arrived there the band played! And I am ready to swear that on that lovely Sunday afternoon, among all the chairs, the iron railings, the

stone steps, and the glass houses it blared out three bars of " O, Listen to the Band," that it then gallivanted into the chorus of " Three Blind Mice," which dragged out undecidedly into some " Annie Laurie " ; then followed an attempt at " The Swanee River," which was abandoned half-way through for quite a lot of " The Prologue " from " I Pagliacci."

Demoralised by the band I began to flibbertigibbet about in search of satisfaction, from tea in a blue café to an ice in a brown one, then to inspect the shop windows, to buy some cigarettes which I could not afford, and to read the titles of all the books in Smith's. These perambulations ended up at the little bit of beach which had been the Punch and Judy pitch of the great Professor Smith. An old deck-chair man was piling up his property on the sand, and he burst out excitedly when I asked him about the great man.

" Yes, sir! Professor Smith—old Professor Smith—the finest Punch and Judy showman in the West Country! Yes, he used to do it here. But he's dead now and he ain't done it for two years. And only last week his son applied to carry it on, and they had a Council Meeting about it on the Tuesday—but they wouldn't let him collect up on top on the new Promenade, only on the beach, so he wouldn't do it. He's opening up a fish shop now up in the town instead. Yes, old Professor Smith—he was a big man, sir—a great man—he broke one of my chairs down one afternoon just a-sitting on it. And he had a great big voice. You could hear it over half the town. He used to do it all himself ; he had a wife but she only used to put up the sticks for him and that. He was a clever man, he

knew lots of things, and he had a wonderful memory. Why, his show used to last pretty near half an hour I dare say. Joey and Toby was the great favourites, and he used to do some plate spinning. Yes, and he could dance the hornpipe with his fingers. But, look here, I mustn't stop now, I got my chairs to collect. Of course, it's the band you see! The Punch and Judy ain't anything according to them, so of course they can collect anywhere, but the old show ain't going to be allowed to. Good afternoon, sir! I must get along!"

There's a tragedy for you—all in a breath! The callous band played on, and the crowds rolled by oblivious of the passing of Professor Smith and his show, oblivious also that a possible successor was at that moment standing on his old pitch. The hotels, rearing one above the other, stared at me stupidly with their hundreds of windows, and all the smart shops seemed to look at me disdainfully. Doubtless my own disdainful thoughts were being cast back to me, but I felt that my place was not in Ilfracombe, that its gaiety would make me die of melancholia in a week. I must get back to the country—to the small places—where I could get in touch with wholesome, workaday people. Besides, after all this, to confess the truth, it was quite out of the question. A pitch on a sea beach is a serious business proposition. How, with my capital of threepence halfpenny, was I to put down the necessary rent which might be anything from fifty to a hundred pounds?

IX

A NICE GIRL—WOOLACOMBE—THE FUTURE LIFE—AN ENGAGEMENT—CROYDE—HOSPITALITY

I SAUNTERED away, and, after buying a zither for the puppets to play, screwed up sufficient courage to enter a millinery shop. I did not realise what a man of the road I had become until I entered this shop with its atmosphere hushed by the stuffy bales of silks, satins, and muslins. My voice, which by degrees was accommodating itself to out-of-door performances, was like the barking of a dog, and my dusty, hobnailed shoes were too big and noisy for this neat, refined shop.

Another thing I realised in the shop was my total ignorance on the subject of stuffs, and I had to enter into an embarrassing, amateurish description of how I wanted something bright and showy, but pretty and not expensive for dressing Punch and Judy figures. The name of Punch immediately enlivened the dead atmosphere in the shop, and awakened the artificial-looking girl behind the counter.

"Do you do Punch and Judy?" she asked, and I told her humbly what I was doing.

"But how clever of you!" she burst out with surprising enthusiasm and flattery. "That's an

ideal way to live! I do think that's a clever thing to do!"

This was an unexpected attitude of mind to encounter in a milliner's shop; it was just another instance of Mr. Punch's charm and power, which fascinated the girl still further into producing an unofficial drawer full of odd cuttings from which I was at liberty to select, free of charge, any pieces I wanted.

I was glad to get away from this holiday town and out into the decent country again. A stiff head wind and hills made my progress slow and hard; and I was glad when rain forced me to camp early in a field high above Woolacombe, where I spent the evening in giving the puppets their first instruction on the zither.

The next morning I went down the long hill into the town to investigate the possibilities of showing, and I soon came up again with my tail between my legs. I found that Woolacombe was very cut off from the rest of the world by its long hill, that its visitors could get very scattered on that tremendous beach, that the beach belonged to a fastidious lady, that it was managed by an agent, that this agent only the day before had turned away a small band, and that if I did get permission to perform there I would have to pay well for the privilege. Finally the local landlords were very adverse to camping. Here was an ugly array of difficulties which I solved at once by turning my back on them for ever. It seemed to me that Woolacombe had so arranged things as to exclude puppet-shows and minstrels, and nice things like that. I did not mind! It was still early in the morning, and there

is as much pleasure in running away from nasty things as in travelling towards the pleasant, and I hoped that I was doing both.

As I walked away from this detestable place I came to some cross-roads where an old cottage woman was inspecting the stock of a travelling shop, an old cart piled up with a medley of pots and pans, clothes lines and brushes, paraffin and soaps. The stout proprietor and the old lady both surveyed me curiously as I approached, and I dare say they were asking one another who this stranger was in their district.

" Work and keep cheerful," shouted out the bluff old chap, as I tugged up the hill to him. " What have you got there, a Punch and Judy ? Have you been giving them a turn down in Woolacombe ? "

" No," I said, " Woolacombe does not seem to want me from what I hear."

" Oh," said he, " you would have to see the agent there, but I don't suppose he would let you in. A friend of mine was turned off the beach a while back with his ice-cream barrow."

" They are very fussy about everything there," said the old lady. " Why don't 'ee try Croyde—we're too high class here, you know."

" Ah," said the man, " nobody wouldn't interfere with you in Croyde. 'Tis a nice little place—you could get there in a couple of hours."

" You'd do all right there," agreed the old woman. " It's an easy road. But you needn't have come down here if you'd only knowed. Never mind, keep smiling. I wish I could see old Punch. I used to like 'ee when I was a kiddy."

As I had already planned to make my way to Croyde I was pleased to hear their encouraging account of it, and I followed their instructions for getting there so that I would pass through the village of Georgeham.

" That's it," said the old man as I pulled away from them, " you give them a turn at Croyde, and work and keep cheerful."

As I travelled the lonely road to Croyde my plans began to take shape. This was not the first time that people in one district had sent me on hopefully to another. There seemed to be a delightful belief in the future life in this part of the country; according to these imaginative people there was always an Utopia ahead for me. At Lynton I was advised to try Ilfracombe; but at Ilfracombe some men to whom I spoke agreed that I " would do something " at Woolacombe ; but here the old couple had advised Croyde, and when I got there another man said, " I know where you'd do all right and that's Saunton," but when I reached Saunton I was told that Barnstaple on a market day was the place for me.

My plan was to embrace all these theories by trying each of the places on this bit of coast between Croyde and Bideford. I could see from the map that this part was fairly level and that I would be able to wander up and down easily, doing shows now and again in each place. If I could obtain sufficient pennies to live on by doing casual shows I might also, by sticking to this district, manage to get some engagements at the local bazaars and fêtes. And for engagements I would demand a fee!

The thirty shillings which I had received at Combe

Martin had made me greedy, and the organised audiences vain and ambitious. Why should I tear myself to pieces for a miserable collection of three shillings and tenpence! Why should I, who was every bit as good as the great Professor Smith, perform to thirty straggling people when The Peep Show was capable of interesting a solid audience of two hundred! Engagements were the things I wanted! Engagements and a fee! But how I was to get them was an inscrutable mystery to me, and the only plan I could think of was to knock at people's doors and say, "Here you are—here is a travelling puppet-show—can you make any use of me?" I had often seen advertisements in newspapers of Punch and Judy shows being "open for engagements." In that respect I felt very open, and if only I could achieve a more or less fixed address for a few weeks and collect sufficient pennies for the expense, I decided to adventure forth into the art of advertising. At all events I looked forward to an enjoyable time among such romantic places as Barnstaple, Bideford, Westward Ho! and Appledore, where there would always be the sea to bathe in, pretty country to camp in, and the good Devonshire folk to talk to.

By the middle of the afternoon I was pulling through the sleepy village of Georgeham. There was only one person to be seen, a young man painting the front of a house, whom I looked at as I went by and who looked at me. In a minute or two I heard a shout behind and found the young fellow running after me with his paint brush in his hand.

"I saw you go by," he said. "Are you a Punch and

Judy? Where do you come from? Are you staying about here? Because if you are we are having a fête here in August, and it has been suggested by the committee that a Punch and Judy would be a good thing. Are you open for August 15th? What do you charge? Could I write you anywhere?"

An engagement! What did I charge! A fee!

So this is how things work in this mysterious world! I had walked into Georgeham at the very right moment, and one of these desirable engagements had presented itself to me. If I had not run away from Woolacombe, if I had not lost my way during the morning, if I had not stopped to sit under a pleasant tree and smoke an idle cigarette, in all probability this young man would never have been painting his house at the precise moment when I wandered by. I booked the date of his fête and his address, and promising further communications went on whistling; I was very pleased with this happy-go-lucky experience which supports me in my hatred of business trainings and commercial efficiency, and all those bothersome ideas which are a perfect plague to happy people, about advertising, card-indexing, and promotion to administrative appointments—the beastly things.

I want to believe in fairy tales. I like the idea of going off to seek one's fortune and meeting a fairy princess. I enter enchanted forests and encounter little old men with whom I share my lunch, or I am surprised by a young man with a paint brush in his hand who is really an angel in a thick disguise. If I were to meet one of these efficient, commercial get-rich-quick systems in a fairy wood I should know it for a Dragon

and run away with my unbusiness-like puppet-show as fast as I could.

From Georgeham I soon got into Croyde, which I found a bright, pretty place of old-fashioned, white-washed houses overhung with walnut trees, and with fuchsias in the gardens. I pulled along by the stream which runs through the village out to the sea beach which is immense, and pounded by great green and white breakers. But there were too few people on this beach for a showman so I pulled back to the village, and within a circle of excited children set up the show opposite the little bridge. A small crowd gathered round and I began, but had not progressed very far when I heard a car draw up outside and a lady calling out in a loud voice:

" Who is it ? Where does he come from ? Go and ask him who he is, and if he has an indoor show. Where does he come from ? "

I was a little distressed by this commotion and interruption of the performance, but I dropped the puppets at once and dashed out in my shirt-sleeves, for I scented here another engagement.

I found myself confronted with an enormous car just where the audience should be, which had been shoved to one side, and in the car was a lady with a grand manner. I was disappointed to find that she was on the committee of the Georgeham Fête, and when she heard that I was communicating with the young man with the paint brush she drove away and left The Peep Show to get on with its performance.

In the late evening I pulled out of Croyde with a collection of nearly six shillings. I came to a field where

two men were hoeing mangolds, and asked them if they had any ground where they could let me camp for the night. With refreshing directness, without any fear or suspicions, they responded at once to my appeal. The elder man waved his hand indiscriminately over his own ground and everybody else's.

" Camp where you like," he said. " Camp here if you like, or on the burrows, or anywhere. But why go farther—here you are——" He stooped to a basket and handed me a bottle. " There ! have a drink of cider—you can have all that—got plenty more at home —have a cigarette."

Here he forgot all about me, turned to his hoeing and disappeared quickly up the field, leaving me with the cigarette and the cider.

The whole transaction was completed in two minutes and in another two I had pulled The Old Encumbrance into the field and was soon perched up on the grassy bank which served as a wall to the field, enjoying a well-earned supper of bread, cheese and cider.

Presently a man in a cycle and side-car drew up on the road behind me and called out:

" Here you are, old man. I saw your wonderful show in the village and was sorry I could not stop to the end."

He held out some coppers for which I presented the bag readily enough.

" It's quite the best thing of its kind I've ever seen ; a great improvement on Punch and Judy. Where did you get it from? Did you make it yourself ? "

I invited him to come up on the bank and help me with the quart of cider, but he had not time for that,

and I had to tell him the story of The Peep Show as he stood in the road.

"Well," he said at the end, "I envy you. I wish I had the courage and the ability to live like that. It's a jolly fine way to live. You are like George Borrow, and I hope some day you will write us some books as interesting as his. What a good time you must have—how I envy you!"

He soon drove away; the farmer and his labourer finished their hoeing and went home too; the sun went down and I was left alone to set up the tent on the margin of grass between the mangolds and the bank, to wander a little under the stars, and then to crawl into my tent and sleep.

X

SAUNTON—SHOW ON THE SANDS—PHOTOGRAPHS AND ICE-CREAM—NO CAMP

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I HAVE never experienced such cheerful awakenings as those in my little tent. There, in the field beneath Down Point, I came out of the sleeping-sack into a dawn sunny and fresh, into a bright world of golden sunlight and glistening dewdrops. It is an exquisite pleasure to find oneself so suddenly in the sweet morning air, to tumble out of bed, to clamber over a stone wall and scramble across some rushy dunes down to the untrodden seashore, there to take one's bath in the lively breakers. There is such a sense of calm spaciousness about the early atmosphere. All the world seems refreshed and rejuvenated ; nothing but Youth and Beauty walks abroad. Sunlight and dewdrops make a glittering world, where, beneath these charming decorations all the sticks and stones, the grass, the furze bushes, and even the rows of mangolds take their place in the fairy scene. There is a buoyancy and a crispness in everything, an infectious spirit of loveliness and life. There is room to live, and to be alive seems a magnificent blessing.

It was still early and the road was deserted when I set off for Saunton. Now here I was, arrived at that

bit of country which I hoped " to work " for a few weeks. Croyde had furnished me with a casual collection of six shillings and an engagement. If Saunton, Braunton, and a few other places could encourage me to a similar extent, then my dreams of staying in this part of the world might come true. My dreams were of the rosiest that morning as I wandered along the bare road on the hillside with the green-and-purple sea below and the wild, bright hill of gorse and heather above running up to the bluest of skies. In those brilliant hours I reared up castles and puppet-shows too splendid for Paradise itself. I wandered up the hill among the heather, and from the stone wall by the roadside I enjoyed the expanse of sea that stretched away so gently to the dim coast about Clovelly.

By the middle of the morning I was in Saunton, and among the boarding-houses and hotels I found a steep hill leading down to the shore. As I went down I could not help remembering my own and other people's jaunty ideas about doing a Punch and Judy show on sea beaches. It was such an easy thing to think of doing, just a bit of fun. But when I came to the actual task it was to find that a popular sea beach is a serious business affair. At Ilfracombe there would have been a stiff rent to pay; at Woolacombe there was an agent to overcome, and now, when I had come upon a free beach at Saunton, it was to find my wheels buried in six inches of loose sand. For a hundred yards I progressed as if the wheels were deep in glue; on a portion of wet sand progress was easier, but then I had to negotiate a region of shingle and irregular boulders. My word! But it is no joke doing Punch and Judy shows!

These struggles brought me to the civilised part of the beach, to a few bathing-tents, an ice-cream man and his stall, an old chap with two donkeys and some deck-chairs, and also a photograph-while-you-wait man. The three of them had made their preparations : the donkeys were saddled; the oranges, the toffees and bottles of pop were neatly arranged on the stall; the photographer had his bucket of water, and they were now waiting with their nets spread for a promised influx of excursionists who were to arrive in the afternoon.

Coming on them as a stranger and as a rival hunter after pennies I felt very doubtful as to how I should behave towards them. Their reception soon decided this difficult point of etiquette. It was the donkey man, a tall, handsome old chap, who first noticed me. With a beaming smile and with quite childish joy he cried out:

" Why! If it aren't a Punch and Judy show! Well I'm blessed! "

The ice-cream man wiped his hands on his white apron and came up to me smiling amiably, while the photographer took his pipe from his mouth to promise me some good audiences a little later on. Their reception was so friendly and natural, their smiles so guileless that I felt a brother " beachcomber " at once.

After a refreshing swim and some lunch I set up The Peep Show ready for action while the photographer poured out his woes to me. Here it was already two o'clock and he had only taken two photographs, while by this time yesterday he had taken thirteen, and that was bad enough. We sat down on a rock to enjoy a friendly smoke, and this was the tale he told:

"I was first of all a tailor and then I kept an hotel at a seaside town. One day when I was sailing I made friends with a Spaniard. We got on well for a few weeks, and then one morning he told me he had no more money, so I lent him some to start a photographic studio with. We then heard that the instantaneous photographic stunt was being a great success in America, so we bought an outfit and tried it. My friend worked it and I just went along to keep him company. We went out on the parade where there were a lot of coal-miners, and we soon got a crowd round us clamouring to be photographed. My friend worked away but nearly every photograph was a dud. Not that that mattered, for black as the pictures were the miners seemed to be pleased with them and they all wanted to be taken. But it worried me. That's always been my fault—I'm too conscientious to swindle the public. So I studied the thing, found out how to work it properly and took the job on myself. Of course my friends about the town were very surprised to see me doing this sort of thing, and after I had been carrying on for some weeks one of them came up and said he had been watching me and he saw now what I was doing —I was making money. And it was true—as true as I stand—am sitting here. Then the war came. I joined up and the hotel business broke down, but after the war I bought this up-to-date machine, the best you can get, and made the price of it very quickly while I was still in camp. Now I've got a shack down the road to go on with and in a year or two I hope to move into something better."

I asked him what he did in the winter.

"I do a bit at a fair sometimes," he said, "but there should be no need to work in the winter. I reckon to take a hundred photographs a day during the season." As he was charging a shilling each for his photographs he would at that rate be taking his five pounds a day.

After this recital several waggons and chars-à-bancs deposited their passengers at Saunton, and we soon had a fair crowd on the beach. There were a number of stout and thin old ladies, and a corresponding number of husbands all in their stiff Sunday best, who settled themselves in black and sober groups about the rocks. The younger people spread themselves out to play games and to shout. The ice-cream stall was immediately surrounded with a crowd of customers, and the two donkeys began their job of walking dismally to a point and then turning round to trot home in a hurry. The photographer launched a veritable attack upon his victims. With camera in one hand and his bucket in the other he dashed upon the different groups with fierce excitement. To him it was a dire necessity that they should be photographed, and photographed they were.

It was late in the afternoon when I and the photographer compared business notes. "Not much go in this crowd," he said with a sneer, and grumbled at having taken only three pounds. I confessed that I had not done very well, but I did not dare to invite his scorn by saying that three shows had only brought me in as many shillings. I was ashamed. I picked up The Peep Show in desperation and set it in a new position where the people were thickest. I blew the

trumpet and went round announcing a show. After the performance I collected from everyone, whether they had seen the show or not. This effort resulted in a collection of four shillings, and an ice-cream from the smiling proprietor of the stall who said he liked to see something with a go in it.

At seven o'clock the excursionists went away in their chars-à-bancs, and we four business men were left to pack up. The photographer invited me to join him at the hotel in a whisky and soda, but I was too anxious to find a pitch for the night to indulge in that conviviality. The donkey man soon got his tents and chairs into his cart, and as he drove past me he said, " Well, young man, I 'ope you've done well, and that us'll see 'ee here again." The tide was creeping round the legs of the ice-cream stall and I lent a hand in packing the oranges and bottles of pop into the cart, and in taking down the sticks. As a reward my truck was hitched on behind the cart and I was saved the labour of pulling it over the sand.

I pulled into the little village, which is a row of cottages and two old whitewashed farms standing under great elm trees. The first farmer had no room or no inclination for my camping, and the second farmer was away. I pulled a mile back to the Burrows, an arid, melancholy waste of sandy hills and rushes, where in the last of the glimmering twilight I found a little fairy hillock covered with pretty young ash trees. Here, under the canopy of leaves with the stars glittering between, I slept in the open without bothering to set up the tent.

XI

ORCHARD CAMP—CHILDREN AND THE SHOW—THE ICE-CREAM MAN

IF Saunton was unkind to me in the evening it made amends in the morning. After breakfasting on the lonely Burrows I returned to the village, and finding Farmer Herneman at home asked permission to camp in his fields. This perspiring and enormous man was plainly puzzled by such an exotic affair as a well-spoken young man with a Punch and Judy show and a light-weight camp, but he scratched his head and brought his mind to bear upon the subject. I understood him to say that it was hot, that it "was turrible warm work up in t' field," but for the most part his good Devonshire dialect left me wondering. I hazarded some sympathetic grunts which were neither "yea" nor "nay" in character, hoped his crop was a good one, and that the fine weather would hold out a day or two. At this his speech seemed to grow plainer, and presently he was inviting me to camp anywhere I liked, and to have a cup of tea with the missus when I felt like it.

In a corner of one of his orchards I set up the tent, and as I drove in the pegs and saw how well the encampment fitted with the surroundings I was soon

conceiving plans of staying there for a few restful days. The puppets were in need of certain renovations. On the Saturday I would be able to perform again on the sands to the week-end influx of visitors, and perhaps in the meantime I might achieve something in the way of engagements. These were quite feasible plans, worthy of a professor of business; but the pleasure of camping in a pretty country so near the sea was the dominant attraction. I liked my corner in the orchard. It was an ideal place of green grass and old apple-trees. A happy mixture of sunlight and shadow, with a cool breeze wandering through it. Over the hedge between the elms I could see the white village and the downs beyond; from over the Burrows I could hear the waves beating on the shore.

I took all this as one of the rewards that come to a wandering showman. Beyond going into Braunton and getting myself engaged to perform at a Bank Holiday Fête I hardly stirred from the orchard. I turned out the two boxes and enjoyed a glorious spring cleaning. The puppets were as appreciative of the surroundings as the showman, and looked over the edge of their box with a lively anticipation. They scattered themselves about the grass and among the apples on the trees, and were very impatient of a few necessary stitches to their clothes, or touches of paint on the ends of their noses. I wandered about barefoot, leaned over one gate and conversed with the horses in the next field, or leaned over the road gate and conversed with various passers-by. For the first time I put the puppets through some carefully studied rehearsals, and launched out tentatively into new

scenes. I began to think of settling down here for life, or at least for the summer. From the Saunton beach I would be able to collect my pound a week, and in between the shows I could sit in the orchard making, or thinking about making, the most delightful puppet-show that ever was.

On the Saturday afternoon I was down again on the Saunton sands in company with the ice-cream stall and the donkeys. A number of children were on the shore, and these gathered round as soon as I set up the show. They clung to me the whole afternoon and most of them watched every performance. The Peep Show became the children's rendezvous, and if some of them were torn away by nurses or parents to bathe or to get their tea, they arranged to meet again on the shingle bank outside my theatre.

Inside the curtains, between the performances, I sat listening to their talk, and for once in a way an eavesdropper heard some good of himself. After enjoying a period of general discussion their interest came back to the show.

"I wonder what he will do this time. What did you see? I saw them fighting—weren't they funny! I've seen lots of Punch and Judy shows. I like this better than Punch and Judy. Do those little figures speak? No, the man speaks for them. I thought he had a lady in there too. Did you? I wish they would do the moving again. Have you bathed? No, I wish he would hurry up or I shall have to bathe before the show begins. Hurry up, Mr. Punch—we are waiting. Mr. Punch! Hurry up!"

Then began an argument between a clergyman and

his son who wished to see the fun. The son was requested to go away and bathe, but he stoutly refused to be shifted from the show. All the persuasions of his mother and sisters and the gentle pulling of his father only got him standing sideways on one leg, and one hand out of his trouser pocket. I could see this drama through a hole in the curtains, and was inspired to put up a puppet who told the boy to go away as there would not be a performance for a long time. But this was a great mistake, for the urchin thought the show was about to begin; tore himself away from his father, and sat down on the shingle with his eager eyes directed to the theatre. So I went outside myself and added my persuasions to those of his relations, explaining that my puppets were having their tea and a smoke, and that they would not come out for a long, long time. Now this had been quite an affair on the beach, collecting a few spectators around, and may I be forgiven, but I started a performance to this ready-made crowd almost as soon as the lad's back was turned. I feel the guilt of it on me to this day.

These children's minds were probing into the depths of my performance, and they surprised me with their remarks and powers of observation. It was essential that nearly everything in my travelling outfit should serve two purposes. The large black bottle which was a theatrical property in the scene of " The Magic Chest " was a water-bottle in my camping equipment. But this afternoon, in order to support myself through some hours of showing, I had filled it with tea, and these children had actually noticed in the successive performances that the contents of the bottle were

getting less and less. To my embarrassment two minute sisters in rainbow waders had peeped through the curtains just when I was in the act of tipping up the bottle, and had run back to their mother with loud cries of "He's drinking his beer! We saw him drinking his beer! Come and see the man, mother!"

So my time on the beach passed pleasantly with the children, for besides listening to them from inside the curtains I sometimes sat among them on the shingle, making friends with them and their amiable parents. I collected nine shillings and elevenpence, mostly in pennies, the ice-cream man contributing again from his stock, this time in gooseberries. When our patrons had all gone home we packed up our respective properties and debated one with another which was most tired by his day's work. He grumbled at the length of his day.

"I get up at four on these days when I come out," he said. "I have to make two lots of cream, one for the wife in the shop, and one for down here. Of course I do pretty well on a good day—everything sells for more down here than it does in the shop. I get twopence a bottle more for pop and a penny more for oranges, and of course if I run short towards evening and there are lots of people about the price goes up a bit more. But it's a long day. When I get up I open my eyes with two good cups of tea and then I take a couple of raw eggs, and don't have anything more till nine or ten o'clock, when I'm ready for a good all-round breakfast. Then I come down to the sands and don't have anything all day not until I get back in the evening, when I have a good dinner of whatever

is going—roast meat, steaks, pudding, anything. Then comes the best job of the day—jolly nice job—count the takings!"

And that must take him a good time, for there was a circle round his stall all day, licking ices, chewing sweets and drinking pop. He must have taken as many pounds in the day as I took shillings. So while he was making a fortune by giving people the stomach-ache and ruining their digestions, I, the artist, the inspirer of gladness, of joy, of laughter, must tear myself to bits and starve.

XII

WHEN IT RAINS—THE REAL THING—I MEET A BUFFALO—POTSBOROUGH SANDS

CROUCHING on all fours at the door of my little tent I looked out into a Monday morning grey and misty with rain. It was that steady, unashamed kind of rain that means to keep falling for a long time, and I was undoubtedly confronted with that question so persistently levelled at me by uncamping people —whatever do you do when it rains?

This is what I did. I shut up the tent as closely as I could manage and then crawled back into bed—not to sleep, but to sit up in a comfortable state of undress. Then I lit the stove, put on the milk and water for coffee, and cut two large slices of bread for toasting. Then I reflected that I was warm and dry, that I was about to breakfast in bed, that I had some books to read and some socks to darn, and that I envied hardly another man in the world.

The good breakfast reduced me to such a deplorable state of comfort that I declined to wash up, or to get up—and I quite forgot the socks. Instead I pulled out a pencil and note-book, and there among all the crumbs and unwashed dishes fell into a blissful reverie, in which with the help of several cigarettes I wrote

down the following words as an explanation or an excuse for the modern poet:

I am a poet, I—sitting—tired—grumbling.
A poet too tired for rhymes,
Too sad to sing in jaunty rhythms,
Weighed down, oppressed with modernity.

Haunted and moved by the poems of old,
The songs of sleeping poets—
Their songs once—but now their dreams.
Faint—incomplete—unsatisfying to us who must live and sing
The Twentieth Century.
The distinguished Twentieth Century,
Distinguished
By its dirtiness.

Athens and Rome paid tribute to the Gods
In white marble and immense praise.

And we have our Temples too.
We can imitate the Art of Greece, of Egypt, even of Timbuctoo.
But our genuine outpouring of native spirit,
Our particular contribution to the Ages
Is the black smoke that rises from a million grimy stacks—
The Black Country ! ! ! ! ! !

It took some time to get as far as that. This true but gloomy picture might have been painted blacker still had I not been interrupted by the piping voice of a boy outside the tent asking if there was anyone at home.

This boy had come to tell me that a lady at Baggy Point was coming to see me about doing a Punch and Judy show for her on Wednesday. This disturbance over I laced up the tent again, got back into bed and continued the poem, which by this time I was beginning to enjoy thoroughly.

Yes, we have our Temples,
Immense—marvellous—even artistic.
They rise around us, and above, and below.
In country—in town—Kingsway—Aldwych—
Where you will.
And their offerings to the Gods are immense and marvellous,
But not always artistic.
Soaps, corsets, margarines,
Powder-puffs and toffee,
Millions of mantelpiece ornaments,
Litter for gimcrack tables,
Imitations—substitutes—adulterations,
These are the offerings of our soaring Temples.
And the music, the poetry, the praise,
All our passion and fervour of life
Is expressed in a new music
Of typewriters and telephones,
Hooters and Crushers and Grinders,
Rackety mowing machines,
Strident whistles and steam sirens.
With such harsh sounds we speak aloud
Our agony to the Ages.

Here another voice called to me from outside the tent. This time, a baker, who quite incidentally offered

me some bread, but with great eagerness informed me that a lady at Baggy Point was coming to see me about doing a Punch and Judy show for her on Wednesday. This confirmation of the boy's report made the engagement sound a certain thing, and I went on with my poem with hope revived.

I, the poet, retire.
For me the woods of green trees,
The clean air, and the bright sunlight.
The rivers flow as of old through the green fields,
Among the silver and gold of daisies and buttercups,
Under stately elms, or the delicate willows and alders.
Here birds are flying and fish swimming,
The animals progress upon their graceful legs
Naturally and calmly,
Except,
When man appears—
Then, like a poet, they retire
More quickly than gracefully.
For twentieth-century man has abandoned his graceful legs
And is whirled hither and thither by snorting devils that cough and bark,
Greasy, gritty abominations of stinks and dirt.

I, the poet, fly with the birds
From the coarse young men
And the thoughtless women who bestride the aimless engines,
All racing one another
Up and down the roads
To Nowhere.

For me the sweetly running river,
The sensitive trees, the singing birds.
My pictures—the landscape.
My drama—the movements of the heavens.
My orchestra—the blended country sounds.
My Temple—the great wide spaciousness of Nature.

Some day perhaps the poet will re-awaken
And sing
In exquisite, satisfying rhyme,
In maddening rhythms.

So! There is the *credo* of a wandering Punch and Judy man, and when I came out of this delightful period of dreams and self-indulgence I found that I had solved the problem of what to do when it rains, for the rain had ceased and I was at liberty.

As I looked over the orchard gate, waiting for a gossip, a motor-bus pulled up in the road and the driver beckoned to me. He leaned over his door and he said:

"There's a lady at Baggy Point wants to see you about doing a Punch and Judy——"

I did not wait for any more. I obtained the lady's name and address, and, although it began to rain again I set off to trace this thrice-repeated message to the fountain-head. The rain came blowing off the sea in a drenching mist which soon saturated my only clothes, but all the same I enjoyed the walk, which might, as the folk say about here, "have something on the end of it."

I reached the house and interviewed the lady, and found myself engaged, not to the lady, but to get the

show down to a place called Potsborough Sands, where I was to entertain a picnic party of school-children. This was my second engagement and already I began to feel professional, a feeling which became very decided when I was asked if I would " take something," and was served with cider and cake, and the cook, in the cook's sitting-room.

The coming of Mr. Punch into this district seemed to be the satisfaction of a long-felt need, for on my way to this Potsborough Sands two more engagements appeared before me miraculously, but unfortunately both for the same afternoon. The first was for a Conservative Fête in August, which I accepted, and the second was an approach from the Order of Buffaloes, who were arranging an outing for the Workhouse people of a neighbouring town.

" We want to prove," said the particular Buffalo who approached me, " that the Order of Buffaloes is a good institution. People think we just meet at a pub to drink beer, but we do lots of good without fussing about it, and now we are going to show the general public by providing this outing to the poor that we can do something else besides drink a drop of beer. People look down on us, but look at me; I don't go to church or chapel myself but I like to mix with people who do, because I find sometimes that they have better ideas about things, you know, than people who don't go to church! And we are going to do this thing properly—it's chars-à-bancs and tea, and we've hired the swings and the roundabout for the day, and I thought if you could come along for half an hour or so it would just be proper all right."

I was disappointed at not being able to come in with the Buffaloes and to see more of their natural, human way of distributing charity.

It was a good pull to Potsborough Sands away over the down which runs out to a wild sea at Baggy Point. But when I did get there it was to find a lovely stretch of sand beneath the cliffs and a blue sea fringed with white breakers. I soon stripped and bathed, which was a good refreshment after the stiff pulling. By the time I had finished an alfresco lunch on the rocks the children began to arrive, and put the showman in a good temper by hailing The Peep Show with squeals of delight. Before long about a hundred children had arrived, and I found myself and the village schoolmaster playing leap-frog round the sands with the boys. Then we played at egg-in-cap and cricket, after which the schoolmaster strolled off for a pipe and a rest, and I joined forces with the schoolmistress and the infants to play a game which was new to me.

We formed the classic circle with one child in the centre, and as we went round we sang:

The farmer's in his den,
The farmer's in his den,
Hi-ti-tiddly-hi !
The farmer's in his den.

After the verse we paused whilst the child in the centre drew another into the circle. We circumambulated again and to this action sang the appropriate words:

The farmer takes a wife,
The farmer takes a wife,
Hi-ti-tiddly-hi !
The farmer takes a wife.

And so we continued verse by verse until the wife had taken a child and a nurse, and the nurse had taken a dog, whereupon we all fell upon the poor dog, singing:

We all pat the dog,
We all pat the dog,
Hi-ti-tiddly-hi !
We all pat the dog.

And we all continued to pat the unlucky dog until the schoolmistress said, " Now that's enough, children," when we all took hands and started again, not forgetting to let ourselves go when it came to the " Hi-ti-tiddly-hi ! "

Had it not been for the show I would have been content to spend the whole afternoon in singing that expressive Hi-ti-tiddly-hi ! with these Devonshire children on that glorious beach, but presently the audience was assembled and seated over the face of a large rock, and the puppets went through the first half of their programme. Then we all had tea. Some large wood fires had been boiling picturesque cauldrons of water, and innumerable washing-baskets were produced out of which came a generous quantity of sandwiches and cakes. And, truly, my luck was in that afternoon, for after I had made a good start at one washing-basket my patroness invited me to take tea with her, and out of sheer politeness I was forced to begin all over again at a second washing-basket.

It was arranged that the second part of my performance was to take place after tea, seemingly with the idea of giving the children an opportunity to digest

the rich cakes more than to amuse them. All the same, the show was an hilarious success, and the puppets received a very spontaneous "call" at the end. "Where's John Barleycorn? Where's Martha? Where's thart there boxer?" the children called, and as each figure appeared it was greeted with a mighty shout.

The proceedings terminated with races and a presentation of balloons, when we all started off over the down for home. "Us'll gi'e 'ee a pull, mister," cried some boys, and seizing hold at different points of the show we all went up the steep hill together, accompanied by a cheerful racket.

By nine o'clock I was back at my quiet encampment, tired but happy, soothing my soul with a bland supper of bread and milk. My appetite for "engagements" was increased by this cheerful day's experience, which had been an enjoyment in itself and had added twenty-five shillings to the exchequer, for as well as the fee of one pound I was presented with a "tip" of five shillings.

XIII

ON COMPOSING PUPPET PLAYS

I WAS sitting in the tent cooking some supper when I heard a rustling in the grass outside and in a moment a smiling boy appeared at the door, flinging himself on the ground with a cheerful " Hallo, mister ! Are you there ! "

No sooner was he safely settled than the rustling was followed by a crackling and breaking sound in the hedge, whereupon the bright eyes of another boy appeared in the bushes, who, seeing his friend received amicably, approached the tent to join him. At the same time two cropped heads and two more pairs of bright eyes appeared lower down in the field, and after forcing their way relentlessly through the hedge two more urchins spread themselves out on the grass before the tent.

" 'Ee loikes living loike this, doan't 'ee, zir ? " asked one of them.

" Why, yes, I do," I replied.

" Do yer do all yer own cooking ? " asked another.

" 'Ow do yer do about yer washing ? " was what worried a third.

" I suppose 'ee makes a good bit o' money a-showing and that, doan't 'ee, mister ? " cheerfully demanded the fourth. And so they went round again each in his turn.

" Where yer left yer missus, zir?"

" Coo! 'e ain't got a missus—'ave yer, zir? "

" 'Ave yer, mister ? "

" Mister! do yer atter do yer own mending? "

I answered these searching questions as well as I could and told the plain truth, for it seemed impossible to put off these candid and discerning minds, all about ten years of age, with anything less. My information at an end and listened to breathlessly with wide-open eyes, the smallest boy of the group, who was perhaps eight years of age, said, with a strong note of disapproval:

" Cor! I should goo to a poob! Why don't 'ee goo to a poob, zir? "

" I like this better than a pub."

" I shouldn't. Doan't 'ee drink, zir? "

" No."

" Cor, I do! "

" Do you? What do you drink? "

" Cider, zir ! "

" And how much do you drink? "

" Oh, about 'arf a glarss, zir! "

I was relieved to find it no worse than that. From this motherly interest in my domestic affairs the urchins soon progressed to the puppets and with the same deadly, analytical method searched out the truth. They wanted to know how the figures were worked and how they were made. They could not bring themselves to believe that I had made them myself.

" I bet you bought them in a shop in Lunnon, didn't you, zir? " remarked one of them.

I was shocked by this attitude of mind that all

commodities must come out of a shop, for of course anyone can make a puppet of some sort and no home is complete without its puppet theatre. I exhorted the boys to make some simple figures; to take a block of wood, shape it roughly, stick in a projecting piece for a nose, and paint on two eyes, and a mouth; to drape a clothes-horses with some curtains for the theatre, and then to amuse one another and everybody with performances. They discussed the idea with enthusiasm. They thought they could make some figures, but then, as one of them put it:

" We shouldn't know what to make them zay, zir ! "

They were confronted with the question of composing puppet plays, and I was not surprised, for I was in the same position myself.

These reflective days in the Saunton orchard had set me thinking about the character of puppets and puppet performances ; my company was ambitious to produce its first puppet play as distinct from mere scenes or buffooneries. And I found myself faced with a perplexing task, to express, through the limitations of this theatre, anything resembling a play.

More and more I began to see a reason for the word puppet-show as distinct from puppet theatre; to see it as a spectacle, an exhibition for the eyes more than the ears, and to understand that a puppet is not a substitute for an actor, but a curious and distinct being who must be bold and brave enough to live out his own way of life. I could see that the one and only surviving puppet play in English, The Tragical Comedy or Comical Tragedy of Punch and Judy, was a very good example of what a puppet performance should be. The scenes

are short and sharp, and they are made up of actions which tell plainly their own story, the introduction of words being only a subsidiary affair, a sort of cheerful accompaniment. I had certainly discovered in performing out of doors among noisy distractions that if a scene was to be successful it must exist without any finesse or explanations of the plot in the dialogue. Language is for your orators, poets, authors; they are the people to whom words are everything. But let the actor mind his acting and the puppet showman his puppets, forgetting all about the theatre and stage plays, humbly following his puppet and respecting its peculiar needs. Clearly one of the special talents of a Punch and Judy figure is its satirical ability; its very existence is a cruel blow to human beings; it is a melancholy reflection that a figure so alive and in a way so like us can be made from a piece of wood and some odd rags.

Punch and Judy figures have always seemed to me live beings existing without mechanism. And it is interesting that so many people accept them and enjoy them in this way, having never given a thought to the question of how they are made or manipulated. That is a right and proper state of mind for the onlooker, but for the critic or the performer it is impossible to say how these figures should act without first understanding their extreme limitations and simple means of existence.

To explain how these figures are constructed and manipulated is not to give the game away. We know well enough the construction of a violin or a sonnet, but, like violinists and poets, puppet showmen are born, not made. The Life Force of this kind of puppet

is the human hand upon which it is fitted like a three-fingered glove. The figure consists of a wooden head with a hollow neck to which is attached an empty costume, a simple sack with two short sleeves inserted. The hand is put into the costume, the first finger inserted in the neck, the middle finger into one sleeve of the costume and the thumb into the other sleeve. You have only to hold up your hand and twiddle these three fingers when your figure begins to live. That is the only mechanism, the two fingers and thumb, and that is why Punch can hold his baton, pick up the baby, and pull the rope of the gallows. The showman is doing these movements with his middle finger and thumb disguised by the costume of the figure.

Compared with the mechanism of a human actor the limitations of gesture and facial expression are obvious. Your actor can smile, wink, leer, frown, or assume a simple noble dignity; he can look at another character from under his eyebrows or kill him with a mere glance down his nose; if he wishes to be merely rude he can stick out his tongue; would he be friendly he opens his arms. He can wave his long arms in any direction; he can move individual fingers or clench his fists; he has legs which can be straight or bent this way or that, and with a turn of his foot he may express incalculable things.

Not so with the puppet; once he smiles he must smile for ever; if he winks he is condemned eternally to a vulgar life of winking; the carved expression of his face must stick to him always; he cannot lift so much as an eyelash. He has only two limbs, two short,

disproportionate arms with fingerless hands that give him but a small range of expression.

The theatre, like the puppet, presents corresponding restrictions. For all practical purposes it is little more than a frame for the figures; and, if it is to be easily portable, if it is to remain light-hearted and spontaneous and maintain its delightful traditions of simplicity, it must necessarily be so.

These, then, are the tools of the puppet artist and the limitations they impose; a few simple figures with fixed expressions and simple movements, which, although interchangeable, can only be shown two at a time in a sort of picture-frame three or four feet square. And that is why I am always very annoyed, exasperated, indeed infuriated by the superior fellow who, after enjoying and grinning at my puppets for an hour, comes up to me and says something like this:

" Oh yes ! Jolly good ! Marvellous ! I can't think how you do it ! You ought to do ' The Beggar's Opera.' I know what you should do: some of those old Elizabethan plays, or those Russian scenes like ' The Chauve Souris ' would go well; you ought to do Bernard Shaw's ' St. Joan '—you ought to——"

Had I followed all the advice and suggestions given to me it would have been necessary to exchange my two margarine boxes, of which I had grown very fond, for a pantechnicon van; by some means I must have developed into a monstrosity with a hundred pairs of hands, and the little theatre, of which a naked simplicity is its chief characteristic, would have developed into a staggering opera house.

It all amounts to this, that a stage play belongs

inseparably to the stage, and that an opera or a play deliberately designed to get the most out of a company of actors, dancers, and singers can never be imposed upon a puppet-show. But for all that, the superior fellow is at perfect liberty to produce a puppet play of heroic dimensions. Every man his own puppet theatre, say I, and so let us have a delightful variety. It is a worthy problem for an artist; he will find himself in complete artistic control, and if the superior fellow is inspired to produce an opera of fifteen acts in a puppet theatre I can promise him at least a liberal education in his ensuing struggle.

I did not say all this to the four boys with the bright eyes. They had already acquiesced in my ideas of action in puppet plays by stating very emphatically that the boxing scene was their favourite. One must speak in hyperbole or metaphor to such sage beings as village boys, and I quoted to them the remark of a practical old Punch and Judy man, who, in expressing his ideas about the effective use of puppets, had summed it all up in saying, " You must knock 'em about."

As well as theorising I had been practising, and at the show on Potsborough Sands a tentative play had struggled through its first production. Two new puppets had recently joined the company. An undressed head, which I had packed up unfinished when I first set out, had developed into a Pierrot, and out of a piece of cambric I had made a simple Ghost, consequently a Ghost-play was inevitable, and this is how it proceeded.

The first scene commences with Pierrot playing with Sally. He knocks at her window, and, when she

appears, he is hiding behind the proscenium as only puppets know how to hide. When Pierrot does at last condescend to reveal himself to Sally, her place is taken at the window by her father, who sends Pierrot away, a rejected suitor without a fortune. But before he departs Sally interviews Pierrot and explains that her father favours another young man, a Mr. Black, who is to call upon her that afternoon. Upon Sally promising to insult Mr. Black and discourage his further attentions, Pierrot mournfully and reluctantly departs. Sally collapses over the board weeping. There is then very soon a knocking at the door, whereupon Mr. Black, the curate, enters carrying a large bouquet. He proposes to Sally; he is so much in love that he insists upon seizing her dear little hand and kissing it (as loudly as possible). As he refuses to desist from his ridiculous osculations, Sally, rightly enough, holds herself insulted, and, after high words, departs. The curate, as brave as he is bold, decides to wait. He thinks that Sally will return, and that at the second time of asking she will accept him. He sings a song to keep up his spirits, and this is where the Ghost comes in. The Spirit attacks the singing curate from behind, and on the curate turning round again comes upon him from the rear. This is very good traditional " business " for puppets; they perform this sort of hide-and-seek action very well, and you will find that any children in the audience and all the sensible adults will be delighted. Eventually the Ghost attacks openly with shrieks, moanings, and wailings, whereupon Mr. Black says " good afternoon," and disappears, never to return again. Without any necessary explanations

Sally returns ; she has seen Mr. Black departing in a hurry and it is only natural that she should return to the scene. She is of course confronted with the Ghost, who addresses her in a suffocating voice which is difficult to understand. Finally she gathers that she is to catch hold of the Ghost's head and pull it off, which she does with shudders and appropriate fearfulness, but is cheered up to find she is only pulling a suffocating disguise off her own dear Pierrot, who, having watched her difficulties with Mr. Black through the keyhole, had put this Ghost, made like a sack, over his head, and so frightened the undesirable suitor away. The reunited lovers dance for joy, and it is a matter of great regret to the showman that he has not a third hand with which to produce the father who might administer his blessing.

After this performance I felt that I had made a good start. I could tell that by the amount of exercise I experienced in keeping five characters going with two hands. It resolves itself into a species of juggling to hold the stage with a character on your right hand, while with the left you are groping about, hanging Sally on her right hook and then finding Pierrot and disguising him as a Ghost. I came to the conclusion that until I had mastered all these technical necessities behind the scenes I would hardly be free to stagger the world with really great puppet drama.

XIV

BARNSTAPLE—A VILLAGE SHOW —INSTOW—THE ROUNDABOUT MAN

SAUNTON had responded nobly to the cry of Punch. There was no doubt that my grand dream was coming true, that all the paraphernalia of the gods was arranging for The Peep Show to fit into this part of the world. In two weeks' time I was to take part in the Braunton Bank Holiday Fête, and in the meantime I decided to proceed with my plan, to wander on through Barnstaple, Instow, and Bideford, and if time permitted to Westward Ho! and Appledore.

Accordingly, on the Thursday I set out for this little tour. In the afternoon I was in Barnstaple walking up the steps of the police station to ask permission to perform somewhere in the town. My innocent question was met with a stony stare, and the grim and gruff reply:

"You'd better not. You can write to the Town Clerk if you like and perhaps you will be able to rent a pitch."

But writing letters and paying rents was not my idea of doing things pleasantly, and not at all proper behaviour for a vagrant showman, so I trudged on through Barnstaple, over the river and up the hill,

until I came to the pleasant village of Bickington. Here I pulled up outside the post office to write a post card and was besieged immediately by the youngsters.

"What have you got there, mister?"

"That's a Punch and Judy, ain't it, mister?"

"When are you going to show, mister?"

There was no denying such an energetic demand as this, for these village boys asked their little questions at the top of the voice. I said I would show in an hour's time at half-past seven, whereupon these boys rushed off to get pennies and to spread the news to other children. The village street was soon a pandemonium of shouts and arguments, and I was quite frightened by the excitement I had raised.

"Hi! 'Arry! A Poonch and Joody! 'Arf parst seven—are yer comin'?"

"'Arry" took up the cry, shouting to a friend of his:

"Hi! Sloper! There's gorn to be a Poonch and Joody Show at 'arf past seven—are yer comin'? Only a penny to see it."

Sloper was a disagreeable boy, and said:

"I ain't goaing to pay a penny. I'm goaing to see it for nothing. Yer needn't pay unless yer loikes."

So the announcements, and arguments, and a general discussion as to what a Punch and Judy was, went on in a riot of shouting.

I put up the show and waited for the crowd to collect. The windows of the houses opposite were flung up and several families took their seats, for all the world like parties in the boxes of a theatre. The children were merciless in their endeavour to get me

to show at once. In bold, strident voices they kept up an incessant clamour which was fretting my nerves to rags.

" 'Urry up, mister, we're waiting! Why doan't 'ee start! Where's Poonch? Where's Joody? Are you got a dog, mister? Where's it to? 'Urry up, mister! You woan't get any more volk than you've got now! Why doan't 'ee start? 'Urry up! "

A party of village flappers, arm-in-arm, smiled upon me and entreated me to begin at once as they had to be at a choir practice by seven-thirty. At the same time the youths sitting in a row on a garden wall advised me to wait a little longer. But at twenty minutes past seven I could hold out no more, and after letting a herd of cows wander through the audience, and rush, frightened, past the show, I opened up the performance. They were an appreciative crowd and consequently got a good long performance, and after collecting four shillings and sixpence from them I finished up with an extra turn. The choir stayed until the bitter end and then went off in a hurry, rather frightened, for they were at least an hour late for their practice. Several of the youths offered me cigarettes and were anxious to help me pack up.

Within an hour I was comfortably camped on a real gipsy pitch by the roadside, a pleasant green place among thorn bushes well screened from observation. I appreciated my quiet retreat after the racket of the village, and after travelling twelve miles on the roads.

Instow was the next place I was making for. Here I was promised good crowds on Wednesdays and

Saturdays, for on those days people came out of Barnstaple and Bideford to sail their yachts, to bathe in the sea, or to loll about the shore and the sand dunes.

I found Instow to consist of one street, a semicircular bit of road turning off to take in the beach and then returning to the Bideford road. This road is at once the town and the promenade, and looks out over the wide mouth of the river to Appledore, which rises up the hillside, house above house, rather a homely imitation of an Italian lake town rising up from the shores of Como or Maggiore.

On the Saturday afternoon I was pulling along this promenade when I found myself being hailed by the roundabout man on the shore there. He invited me to set up on the sand close to him, and he confessed afterwards that he wanted me there, because he was afraid that a Punch and Judy show would entice the children away from him to some other part of the shore.

This roundabout was the only beach amusement. It was a primitive affair of a dozen small horses which were circulated by the showman standing in the middle and turning a handle. I accepted his invitation, and while I set up my show he gave three children a very short ride for a penny each. When my theatre was ready he suddenly began to announce it for me at the top of his voice, and did not hesitate to tell the people that they were going to see a very nice show. A fair crowd gathered round timidly and I collected the useful amount of four shillings from them.

After the performance I thanked the roundabout man for his help, and said I was surprised that he

should go out of his way to help an interloper and a rival for the people's pennies.

" That's all right, boy," he said. " You've got your living to get the same as anyone else. Besides, don't you see, when you had finished I began to shout, and out of your crowd I got my 'osses full and rode all the kids round at once. Twice I filled it, which is better than getting them dribbling along two or three at a time. Besides, if there's more going on, they spend their money more freely. Now, when I first came here, the people in the shop there wouldn't speak to me because they thought I was going to take their custom away. But bless you, they soon found out that they were doing better, and all because I was attracting people to this bit of beach. And now they call me Mr. Harmer and are ready to do anything for me. Let's have it all in the farm! That's what I say! "

After our patrons had gone home the roundabout man suggested that I should pitch my tent next to his van and spend the week-end there. When we had everything packed up we moved along the beach to where his van was pitched among the dunes. His van was an old trolley covered with a vari-coloured canvas tilt, a ramshackle and picturesque affair. While I was setting my tent he was preparing his supper, frying some fish in an enormous black frying pan over a kerosene flare lamp. There was not much ceremony about his meal, which he took standing at the tail board, drinking his milkless tea from a smutty old billy can and eating his fish from the smoky frying pan. All the time he was eating, which was not long, he was imparting to me his ambition to possess a set of swings.

We were both tired with our day's work, and, after our supper, he pulled out two smart deck-chairs which he hired out to visitors, and we sat down to chat. He did not smoke. He could not. He had tried several times but had always forgotten about it, and I suppose the reflectiveness of smoking did not accord with his quick, talkative nature. He liked a glass of beer sometimes. " But dear me," he said, " I went to a pub the other day, and they said, ' Why, Mr. Harmer, it's twenty minutes after time,' and bless you I never knew the pubs were supposed to be shut then."

I asked if he had always been a showman. " O dear no ! " he said. " It was always my ambition to travel with show people but my father wouldn't 'ear of it. I wish to God he had because I'd 'a' been better off now than I am if they'd given me a start like. But you see what happened, as soon as I was free, I got a show of my own. I've always travelled about with these 'osses, but now I reckon I'm going to settle down here regler." And he told me again about the swings and how there was money in them, because the charge would be twopence, but he could only ask a penny for his " 'osses."

There was an attractive simplicity about this man and I was glad to find that he was a decent family man with a wife and a home in an inland town, with a son who was a carpenter, and a daughter who wrote long letters and was always " awashing herself."

Before we turned in for the night he delighted me with an exhibition of how he would treat an intruder who attempted to molest him in the night. I think this demonstration was given for my benefit, in case I

should be harbouring thoughts of burglary against him, for he had been asking searching questions as to whether I was armed. He climbed into his van, lay down on his bed, and pulled from under the mattress a long, pointed, iron bar, and I shall never forget how fierce his eyes appeared in the dim light, and how he jabbed and jabbed the bar towards me, growling, with every jab, a hoarse and terrible exclamation of " My God! My God! "

We passed a calm and neighbourly Sunday on the sands. He soon began on his pet theme, " A tidy little set of swings," and produced several copies of a paper called *The World's Fair*, reading out to me all the advertisements of swings for sale and asking my advice about them which he never pretended to listen to.

I borrowed his papers and a deck-chair and was soon lost in an atmosphere of side-shows and fairs. Here were innumerable advertisements of pedlars' outfits, cheap Jack stocks, and Hoop-la! swag—china clocks, nickel watches, rings, brooches, safety razors, glistening vases—all good swag!

Nearly every page screamed out something about balloons, squeakers, and streamers, but friend Harmer was bitter on the subject of balloons.

" Don't you buy no balloons. By the time you've paid the post, and carriage, and all that, they cost you sevenpence a dozen. But mind you they don't pay you fivepence for selling, no, nor yet thruppence. They burst, you see, because you have to sell 'em blown up; the kids ain't interested in them unless they're blown up. And I used to blow 'em ever so careful, but dear me they would burst. And then the kids blow 'em and

bust 'em and bring 'em back, and you have to change 'em. O no! No more balloons for me! My God! I 'ad a gross to sell at threeapence each, but I got sick of 'em and sold 'em out at two a penny to get rid of them."

In this paper were several advertisements of Punch and Judy shows being open for engagements, and one advertised for a "butler" which Harmer explained meant a collector. "Butler, bottler, or nobbler, they call 'em," he said.

I was alarmed to find that someone wanted to sell a peep show. When I adopted that name for my puppet theatre I thought that peep shows were quite things of the past, but my friend eased my conscience by saying that this was probably a set of distorted mirrors which made one look fat, or thin, or crinkly, as the case might be.

This encounter with this simple, decent, roundabout man was a gentle introduction to the flavour of the real show life, but he warned me against a closer acquaintance with it.

"It's rough, you know, and you want money—a lot of money, or you will be lost. Now I used to take a pitch at Barnstaple Fair, but it was too rough for me. They used to give me so many feet for my little show, and after I had got it up, the rifle range, as it might be, would come along with the big bugs and ask me ever so politely just to shift along a little bit. Then the swings would come and want it a little more forward. And I would have to shift, or next year there wouldn't be no room for me and my 'osses, you see."

The day dallied itself away with *The World's Fair*,

with some wandering and swimming, and I had to make a drawing of Harmer and his encampment for him to take home and hang up in his parlour. We sat out the twilight again in his deck-chairs, and he rounded off the day with these sentiments.

" Yes, this is proper, this is ! It's a gentleman's life ! I saw what 'ard work was going to be. I didn't want that all my life so I 'ad a look round. O yes ! This is a proper gentleman's life ! "

And in spite of his crazy patchwork of a waggon, his bed made of sacks of dowse, his black frying pan, the flare lamp, the bit of fish wrapped in newspaper and his butter in a chipped jam pot, I saw quite well what he meant, and how for the summer at least he had obtained a measure of independence.

XV

ENGLISH MEADOWS—A CHURCH FÊTE

INSPIRED by the advice of various people I set off the next day for the village of Fremington. A fête was being held in the Vicarage grounds in aid of Church Funds and the consensus of local opinion was that I ought to be there and that I might "do something."

I was glad to get away from camping on the sand dunes, for gradually, with a subtle, sinister persistency, sand was creeping into all my belongings, and by the time it reached the bread and cheese I was tired of it. I pulled away early on the Monday morning with a fixed idea of finding a charming pitch in a green meadow.

How wonderful they are these English meadows! I do not believe there is a pleasanter experience in all this worldly life than to find oneself on a sunny, breezy morning walking in a green field, with daisies, purple scabious, and buttercups dancing in the grass. What rest they can give us! They are the coolest and sweetest balm for a fevered mood. Time and again have I been pounding along a dusty highway with heat and fatigue weighing upon me, consumed with a momentary hatred of the grit and the intolerable hardness of the road. Then is the time to scramble over a

five-bar gate and to sink into the cool grass beneath a whispering tree. The blazing road, all the cruelty of the world is forgotten as in a cloister. Bare your feet to these green blades and you will feel refreshment thrilling through your being. If one had the courage, all the clothes would come off and one would roll, like a horse, in the green bath. But heavens! It would never be possible to do that for fear of being discovered by some massive farmer, or coming under the scorn of some leather jerkined, hermetically sealed motorist!

It was the sight of such a perfect English meadow which pulled me up that morning, and which made me feel that somewhere about there was a pleasant pitch waiting for me. The field stood at a corner of some cross-roads; it had a pond in it, blue with reflected sky, on which the whitest of ducks were sailing. Scattered about the grass in a clucking, grunting, baaing family were chickens, and pigs, and sheep. The grass was of the greenest and the animals so clean and bright that it all seemed like a toy new from the box. A low, thatched cottage stood at another corner, and opposite to that an old white farm. There was such a pleasant air of sanity and natural life about the place that I longed for a camp there and looked round for the proprietors.

I took a turning past the house, seawards, down a lane with a broad green on either side, with picturesque trunks of felled trees reposing here and there. Enormous elms were a canopy to the lane and I wandered on into a farm-yard, through a deep, whitewashed archway into a cobbled court, entirely closed in with

two farm-houses, and some old, timbered barns and cowsheds. All the buildings were white, the woodwork was a vivid green, and before each house was a bright garden of cottage flowers. The place fitted me spiritually like a glove, and, without qualms, I tapped at a door to ask for permission to camp. In answer to my knock at one house a man came out of the other and greeted me civilly. He was joined by the housewife from the first house and between them they decided that I was welcome, the man conducting me down the lane to the meadow of my dreams where I settled down beneath some ancient apple-trees.

Fremington with its fête was about a mile distant, and after lunch I packed up the show and adventured forth to see what luck awaited me there. I was greeted with rain, the most sudden and heaviest that ever fell, and together with several inhabitants I rushed under a huge tree standing picturesquely in the village street. As I gloomily watched the roadway being converted into a torrent I concluded that I had troubled myself for nothing, and instead of getting a collection of pennies I was likely to suffer a good soaking.

But in the meantime a number of chars-à-bancs arrived in the street making a great ado in getting their passengers into the inn. Here was entertainment for us who sheltered under the tree, especially for " granfer," a decrepit and minute old countryman, the oldest inhabitant of the humorous papers. In deplorable language he kept up a constant run of chaff and comment, entertaining us by shouting remarks at the proprietor of the chars-à-bancs, a solemn man too dignified to respond.

" Granfer " chuckled and babbled on. " He wur a village boy. I knowed him when 'e wur a babby—knowed him all me loife—but now 'e's a genelman in Combe, and 'e doan't know I. 'E's making money with they cars, and that be a worrit to 'e. What! They pay a pund a day for riding in they cars! A pund! And what do you think they offers me and my pony and cart fur a day! A shillun'! Only a blooming bob!"

" Yes," chimed in another shelterer, " but your pony is like you, Granfer, you know—the oldest in the village."

The rain ceased as suddenly as it commenced and all we shelterers set off about our suspended business. I came to the fête ground and interviewed a curate at the gate, who interviewed the vicar, and it was arranged that I should perform for collections, the church organisation to take one-third of the proceeds.

Coming in at the last moment like this I seemed to be rather a fish out of water, and I did not receive any encouragement to perform. The curate was a long time deciding on my pitch; then a collector could not be found, and had it not been for the gallant lady who opened the fête, who demanded a show, that collector might never have been found. Even then The Peep Show had to fight for its life, for a char-à-bancs full of an ebullient concert party drew into the grounds, and it was the brilliant idea of the driver that they should give a performance on the spot and be given their tea in exchange. This driver was one of those inspired, ruddy individuals with a large supply of irritable energy which carries everything before it.

He unloaded his party, arranged where they should perform, and then came up to me. He looked me up and down very insolently, and after this wordless inspection asked rudely if I was in a hurry. By this time I was profoundly annoyed by the whole fête. I had been waiting about for over an hour and my patience was at an end. In my turn I stared him up and down and replied, as insolently as I could, that I was never in a hurry, but that Lady So-and-So had asked for a performance of The Peep Show at once and that I was just about to commence. We stood on the lawn and glared at one another like fighting cocks; he seemed to turn from red to purple, but no more words passed between us, for I dived into my curtains and struck up the squeaky music as loud as I could. A good crowd gathered round and the lady patron, with her train, was intrigued away from the fascinations of the Hoop-la! I went through the show leaving the officials to get on with the collection, and when I came out after the performance, not a little nervous, I was glad to find that the concert party and their terrible driver had disappeared.

After this first show my pitch was hemmed in by cars and traps which were parked on the drive, and I had to amuse myself by going the round of the fair, and in listening to the confessions of the curate who did not approve of this kind of thing in aid of church funds.

" Some of these men," he said, " will spend two or three pounds in skittling for a pig, and in throwing at the Aunt Sally, but when they come to church they can only put threepence in the plate."

I am always ready to hear a little scandal of that sort,

but I was getting anxious about another performance, and, as several people had asked me to begin, I applied for another collector. He was a long time in being found, and then, when I began to show, the military band began to play, and in a short time, the curate poked his head through the curtains and asked me to close down as they wanted to commence the presentation of prizes. I closed down obediently and was invited into the house to settle up. The total collection was the astonishingly small amount of four shillings and ninepence, of which I took two shillings and ninepence, leaving two shillings and my blessing, which was not worth much, to the church funds.

As I passed through the village on my way back to the camp, the cottagers were curious to know if I had done well. I told them exactly how the finances had worked out and they commiserated with me sympathetically.

"Ah, they won't give because it's for the church," said a sturdy fellow. "There's plenty of rich volk round here—let 'un give for the church. The next time you coom 'ere, put it up in the village and do it for we."

"Yes," shouted a woman shrilly, "and I'll lay you'll do better than what you would up there," with a significant nod of her head towards the fête.

My only consolation was that the rude chauffeur and his vulgar char-à-bancs party had disappeared without giving their entertainment, which I am sure would have been all about girlies, and curlies, and ma-in-laws.

I spent the next morning sitting under a hedge in the hot sun, making a Ghost, and in cooking a dinner. In the afternoon I went to Instow to do some shopping

and I took the show with me in case there should be any people there to look at it, although Wednesdays and Saturdays, according to common report, were the only possible days.

No sooner had I got there than friend Harmer of the roundabout beckoned to me excitedly and introduced me and the show to a party of excursionists. They had exhausted the joys of Instow and were seated on a low wall with their backs to the sea waiting disconsolately for a char-à-bancs which was not due for an hour. They did not enter enthusiastically into the idea of a performance; if I remember correctly they said not a word and not even one of them smiled. Piqued by this indifference I set up the show and got to work in fighting mood. They gradually drew nearer and gathered round the theatre; a few more people came along and I was able to do two performances, being much cheered by a man in the second audience who exclaimed, in response to my modest request of a copper for a showman:

"What, after all that hard work! That's all good work! and jolly good fun! A copper!" and the enthusiast dropped a sixpence in the hat.

By this time the shops were all closed, and instead of coming to Instow to spend money I found that I had gathered into the exchequer the noble sum of six shillings. I camped again with the roundabout man, who sold me some bread and paraffin, and entertained me with glowing accounts of what he would do if only he had a set of swings.

XVI

PUT WITH THE PIGS—BIDEFORD —HIGH OFFICIALS AND LOW COLLECTIONS—A CHAR-À-BANCS PARTY—THE BUSKERS

MY next job was to make the attack upon Bideford, which town had been recommended by several people as an excellent pitch for a Punch and Judy show. Of course these people had never done such a thing there; they had never done a Punch and Judy show anywhere; the only reason they had for recommending Bideford was that they knew nothing about the place, and consequently knew no reason against showing there. They had been to the town which they found full of people, and it was easy for them to imagine that if all these people saw the show, and if they all put something in the bag, why! what a great big bag that would be! It is a cheap and easy amusement giving other people advice. It is usually building other people's castles in the air, which, after all, is not to be despised, and it certainly gave a zest to my tramp that Thursday morning, for was I not going to Bideford, the finest place in all the world for Peep-showing!

It was a gay, breezy morning, with white clouds flying; the air came fresh from the sea setting all the

trees, the bushes, the hedges, and the fields of corn dancing to its measure. It was a pretty road, going under bits of pinewood, past meadows and cornlands, with the wide river to one side, and over that the wooded hills rising on the other bank. If I remember I wandered along the road composing puppet-plays which were far too ambitious ever to be performed, until I came to the outskirts of Bideford where I met a smiling old lady with a basket on her arm.

I asked her if she happened to know who owned all the land thereabouts and did she think they would allow me to camp on it for a few days. She did not know about that; she knew and did not know quite a number of things, but finally she gave me directions how to find the farmer, and this is what she said:

" You go up this next road to the left which you can't mistake because it's the only one and you go along till you come to the farm. Mr. So-and-So it is and if the land isn't his then it will be the son's which his house is the one this way, and either one or the other it will be so you can't mistake and I hope you will be successful I'm sure young man."

I followed the old dame's directions until I reached two thatched cottages, and here in answer to my inquiries a stout housewife furthered more information.

" Yes, Mr. So-and-So's house is that first one over there behind the trees which you can't see now. He would let 'ee camp all right I dare say but he'm not in now—he'm down in Bideford in his office where you might not find him if you did know where 'twas because you see he might be out and about as I dare say he is, but," said she, " this field next to our garden

belongs to the butcher and it's got pigs in it now so you could go in there I should think."

Pigs in the field—so I could go in!

I could not quite see the logic of that remark and I looked gingerly over the gate into the butcher's field to see if his animals bore any resemblance to myself. An enormous sow lifted her head and gazed at me suspiciously. The family resemblance, if any, was very faint, but when I asked her how she did and she answered with a sympathetic grunt I was not so sure. As we still looked inquiringly at one another a third cottage lady, this time a very thin one, came up to the gate. She was carrying a basket of victuals to her husband who was harvesting, and she also thought that I might camp in the butcher's field. So I climbed over the gate much to the terror of the sow, and sat down under the hedge to eat my lunch.

In a few moments the stout cottager who had classed me so lightly with the pigs came through the gate. She also was on her way with a basket of food for a harvesting husband, but on seeing me she stopped, she passed her basket from one arm to the other, and she blushed. She was obviously nervous and distressed; she shifted her feet, looked at the sky, and, taking a deep breath, she said:

"I wanted to apologise, because if you remember I said that there was pigs in the field and so you could go in there. And when I thought of what I had said I come all over—well, I didn't know what you would think, and I'm so sorry, I didn't mean anything at all."

She was so genuinely distressed that I laughed and hastened to say that I had not noticed the insult,

whereupon she laughed louder than I did. To put it Devonshire wise, she was properly amused with herself.

By this time the thin lady had returned from delivering the luncheon to her husband and brought with her the great news that this husband was in partnership with the butcher and that neither of them would object if I camped in their field. At this cheerful information I pulled The Old Encumbrance through the gate and set up the tent so that I could sit in it and look down on all the houses of Bideford, the river, the bridge, the Quay, and all the little people walking up and down there.

So that is how I got pitched on the hill outside the town, under the maternal care of these nice old cottagers who had behaved to me with such ready friendliness that I began to wonder if I had fallen into some charming Utopia whose inhabitants' first duty was hospitality to strangers.

Bideford is a romantic town with its hilly streets, its views of river and country, and that bright, clean Quay, with the shops on one side and all the ships and river craft bobbing about on the other. But what a place for a Punch and Judy showman!

All the afternoon the officials tossed me about like a shuttlecock. The policeman sent me to the Town Clerk, who was not encouraging, but finally said that he had no objection to my show if that august person the Mayor would give his sanction. A postman directed me to this dignitary. "There he is in the dentist's there," he said, and it was some time before I realised that the dentist and the Mayor were one and the same person. Walking into the operating room I found the

Mayor—the callous man—sitting in the operating chair and calmly reading a newspaper. He entered very affably into the question of Punch and Judy showing, and in the end said that as far as he was concerned I might do my performances, but that I had better see the police. So after this interview I went to the police station and interviewed the Inspector, who said that he had no objection if the Mayor and the Town Clerk were agreeable, and he immediately drew on his blotting-paper an excellent plan of the Quay, the Park, and the Kingsley statue, behind which he gave me permission to stand. Then I returned to the Town Clerk to discuss the question of rent, whereupon an awful dilemma arose between us, the Town Clerk, the Town Clerk's clerk, and myself, for we were all greenhorns together on the question of how much rent a Punch and Judy ought to pay. It was settled in the end that if I " made good " it was left to my honour to contribute something to the Infirmary Fund.

I went back to the camp considerably dazed with all these intricacies, which had only resulted in allowing me to show late in the evening, as I must not rival the town band which would be playing up to nine o'clock. But a green meadow on a high hill-top proved a good medicine, and at eight o'clock I pulled down into the town in the best of humours. I found a street performance already in progress. A rough old character was inviting anyone to tie him up with a length of rope from which he engaged to free himself in three minutes. He was soon lashed up by an amused and very sturdy sailor, and then, standing trussed and helpless, the old chap began to ask for pennies. A few were thrown into

the hat, but he pleaded for half a crown at least. "Think of the price of beer, genelmen," was his appeal. At one and eightpence the contributions came to an end and the performer began to free himself. But I did not wait to see the result, for what struck me all the time was, that this seedy vagrant could never have spent the afternoon in interviewing the Mayor, The Town Clerk, and the Chief of Police, at which I felt considerably piqued and decided to get to work myself.

No sooner had I set up the theatre than a crowd began to collect at once. I was quite alarmed by its size; it crowded all round the show which was being pushed and swayed about. But there seems to be a mysterious privilege which allows a showman to control his crowd physically as well as psychologically, so I pushed back the children and shouted at the adults. Excited by the large audience I plunged into the performance with enthusiasm and from the very first the show went well. The crowd grew larger and larger and laughed hilariously. The puppets were inspired with new witticisms and business which made me laugh too. The Boxing Match was fast and furious, extending itself by several rounds. The Prize-fighter invited any of the boys to come up and box him, and when this challenge was accepted, he dodged behind the proscenium and said: "You hit one your own size." He burst into tears and said he would tell his mother, and the more the children laughed the louder he wept. He rolled on the shelf in an agony of howls and tears until Martha his mother appeared with a wooden spoon and administered comfort on his behind-ends. The crowd pressed about the theatre and it rocked so precariously

that I had to stand on one foot, while with the other at an awkward angle I had to steady the framework. There is a great exhilaration in being at one with the audience, and for the moment I was intoxicated with success, far too intoxicated to remember those ideals of a reformed Punch and Judy show, a refined show, gentle, cultured, and literary.

After three turns I slipped out with my hat to make a collection. I found myself being stared at by a large number of faces, and the next moment all those white faces had disappeared and I was looking at so many backs. I was in that elated state when I was expecting to be carried shoulder high and presented with a generous collection of about ten pounds, but all I could gather in was half a crown. Without any enthusiasm at all I performed and collected again, this time ninepence being the result.

Although this was one and sevenpence more than the rope trick had collected I packed up in a very bad temper—a dismal reaction to the gay show had set in. As for the Mayor, the Town Clerk, and the Chief of Police, I did not care one tinker's curse for them, and I began to think that the only contribution I could ever make to the Infirmary would be, some day, a broken-down, neglected, despised Punch and Judy man in need of a hole to die in.

I decided to forsake Bideford at once and for ever, but I was awakened the next morning by heavy rain falling on the tent. The day was too wet for travelling or for showing, whereupon a passion for reading a book came upon me and I determined to buy a book, shut myself in the tent out of sight of Bideford, and read it.

Of course, just the book I wanted, something long, amusing, exciting, and very cheap could not be found, and I was gloomily deciding on Ruskin's *The Two Paths* when I discovered that the price was five shillings, which was altogether over the head of a vagrant showman. So I rushed to an inexplicable extreme and secured for sixpence, a fat, Victorian volume, known as *Everybody's Annual.* It was full of engravings and selections from the classics; it told one how to make kites (pretty affairs with tassels and faces), and fishing rods, and how to play chess, but, for me its main attraction was a complete novel by Ballantyne, *The Wild Man of the West.* Somehow or other I had come through my schooldays without reading Ballantyne, which seemed to me to leave something of a hole in my literary education. So I retired to the tent, cooked a good lunch, and disappeared into *The Wild Man of the West.*

Stingy Bideford, the incessant rain, my cramped quarters were all forgotten. This optimistic tale of trappers, camp fires, and prairies, with its satisfactory and complete conclusion, carried me very successfully through the wet afternoon, and in going through the volume from part to part I did not stop once to read the entrancing articles on marbles or home-made footballs. I shall certainly read another book by Ballantyne when I get the chance and no one is looking.

There again was answered the question as to what I do when it rains. My bit of meadowland seven feet by four was bone dry, and all my belongings were in the tent or under a waterproof. The large drops of rain came to a sudden, dramatic stop just above my head.

Smack ! Smack !

I sat secure, enjoying my close proximity to the baffled elements.

On Saturday morning rain was still falling, an arrangement I had not counted upon when I decided to walk back to Instow for an afternoon performance and return to a Bideford show in the evening. As there was some promise of the weather clearing I set off in the rain, but half-way to Instow it was so heavy that I went under a large railway arch for shelter. I made myself comfortable and had some lunch, which was mostly draughts, not of Devonshire cider but of a very cool Devonshire wine.

Soon after midday, by which time I was as cold and miserable as a person may well be, I saw a char-à-bancs draw up on the road about twenty yards away. A couple of dozen men scrambled out with much shouting and talking, and, carrying with them two cases and a small barrel, like a group of conspirators in a picture play, made in my direction. They set the two boxes down under the bridge, but the barrel was propped up between two stones on the wall outside. Out of the cases came loaves, and pickles, and an enormous joint of beef. Some rough carving was carried out with a large pocket knife, and soon the whole company were standing about indiscriminately chewing enormous mouthfuls of beef and bread. Meanwhile the barrel of beer had been broached, tapped, and kept busy, and as the men became more cheerful it dawned upon me that here was a ready-made, heaven-sent audience. As the rain had ceased for the time being I put up the theatre on a piece of grass outside the bridge and

announced to these beanfeasters my intention of performing, at which they guffawed, one of them presenting me with a glass of beer which he asked me to drink quickly as they only possessed the one glass.

They were more amused with the show than I had hoped. It had caught their good humour on the rise and through my spyhole I could see these men grouping themselves together before the theatre, each with his beef and bread in hand, mingling their broad smiles with large bites and ruminating chews of the food. If they were amused with the show I was amused with them, but I was suddenly alarmed to see them making ready to depart. I hastened to get outside with my hat, but before I could hang up the puppets they came forward and began putting pennies on the shelf and jumping up to see into the theatre, calling out loudly for " thart old woman—Wurs t'old woman—Show us t'old woman."

So I put up Martha, who thanked " the kind gentlemen," whereupon one man shook hands with her, another prodded her ribs, which was really my hand, with a hard finger, and another, not to be outdone, took off his cap, not from politeness but in order to hit her with it.

The char-à-bancs, the barrel of beer, and the men, drove away leaving me two shillings and eightpence in pennies, and by the time I had packed up rain was falling again. I retreated under the draughty bridge and this time was entertained by a sailor from a ship anchored in the river, who was in a very bad temper because he had sailed round the world without making a fortune.

In spite of the weather I got to Instow and rushed through a performance on the beach, after which I retraced the three miles back to Bideford, and what with putting up and taking down the theatre and the seven or eight miles of tramping this was all good hard work. At Bideford the town band was playing on the Quay and a meeting of some sort was in progress too, but I had the Mayor, The Town Clerk, and the Chief of Police behind me, so I set up again under the grim statue of Charles Kingsley, where the experience of Thursday evening was repeated—a large crowd and a small collection.

Under such circumstances as this I should have had a collector, but the difficulty is to find such a person at a moment's notice. It is not every one who has the ambition to be a street collector, and it is not every one that I would ask to collect for me. I had no objection to getting bigger collections, but at the same time I did not wish to purchase them with the sacrifice of my soul.

That very evening the devil tempted me, but after all his blandishments he only succeeded in contenting me with the small bag. This is how he set about it. As I was packing up the puppets there came sneaking round the back of the theatre a young chap with a fiddle under his arm. With alarming politeness he held out his hand to me and said:

"Well, friend, and 'ow are you? 'Ow's things going on?"

I was careful not to look at the proffered hand, and he was quick to feel the cold reception.

"Don't you remember me? Why, I met you at Mine'ead a few weeks ago!"

I remembered only too well. It was the knowing busker who had been so irritated by our amateurish collecting. He was followed by another individual, a miracle of cheap smartness, whom he introduced, together with a strong smell of whisky, as " my friend." Both were now very anxious to shake hands and thrust out their hands so expectantly and so insistently that I was forced to comply. But as they were not the sort of people who shake hands in the ordinary way, their ingratiating behaviour only made me suspicious. They did not leave me long in doubt of their intentions. They soon intimated that I ought to have assistance and that they were the very people to provide it. The busker led off :

" My friend is about the top notch in collecting ; if he misses anything, well, you may be sure, it's not his fault."

The smartly dressed fellow spoke up for himself. " O yus, I kin collect all right." He smiled fearfully, automatically, like a grotesque, ventriloquial figure. He meant to be ingratiating, but he terrified me, for I could see that his smile did not fit in the least with his trim clothing. There was something uncouth about that smile, something of the underworld, the apache, the—well, the devil was in it, anyhow.

The man with the fiddle leaned nearer to me and in confiding tones, odorous with whisky, continued :

" Now you've got a clever show here, and it must be 'ard work, and you don't want to work for nothing. We don't work, it isn't necessary. All you want to do is to make some sort of a noise on an instrument, and then work at the collecting. There is no doubt

you've got a good show—you've got the draw. Now me and my friend are going down into Cornwall, finest country out for this game, and if you like to join in, why, you see, you could do the show, I could play the fiddle outside, and ' my friend ' could get round and tell the tale."

Momentarily I was attracted to the idea and wondered if I should join with them for a week or two in order to experience their way of living on the road. But something at the back of my head was at work refusing their help, and I soon saw that these two unsavoury characters could never mix with me and The Peep Show. I excused myself on the score of engagements, and we shook hands with terrific heartiness, they bowing themselves away in quite the best penny receiving style.

No sooner were these fortune-making rascals away than I knew that they were the devil, for all the time in their company my mind had been thinking of pubs, and cadging, and no work, and tots, and Woodbines, and making a noise on an instrument. As these bogus artists shuffled away into the crowd, I saw again the beauty of the night coming down on Bideford, the full moon rising over the hills, and the lime trees by the water silhouetted against the silvery brightness. In spite of all the pennies in the world I must be free to see and enjoy this sort of thing, and could never be tied to these snuffling experts in the art of cadging.

XVII

WESTWARD HO!—CHASING A VICAR—A LONG WALK—I NEARLY GET MARRIED

THE permission to show in Bideford being exhausted, my four days there came to an end, and I was soon plunged into restless and fruitless journeyings. I was attracted to the romantic places of Westward Ho! and Appledore, but this part of the world is very hilly and my desire to investigate these towns suffered a severe testing. All the morning I was occupied with tugging my vehicle up stiff hills, and had this not been a land of heroes, had I not felt that Francis Drake and his wild men had their eye upon me, I might have turned back to the level roads on the other side of the water.

By midday I was through the decent old town of Northam, lunching under a hedge on the hill-top, and after that I went down to Westward Ho! only to realise the truth of a pessimistic pavement artist whom I met on the way and who had said to me, " It's a blooming rotten 'ole. You won't do nuffink there." Two farmers were adverse to my camping, but finally I was sent to an old man whom I would find working his allotment. This distinguished old greybeard proved amiable, and leaving his hoeing conducted me

to a narrow strip of grass about the size of a billiard table.

" 'Ere you are," he said, " in 'atween my oats and 'taters. I got a bit of hay off there you see and you won't do no harm. 'Ess, you can fix up there for a bob." It was a horrible place in which to camp, shut in as it was by bungalows and houses, but as a storm was imminent I paid over the shilling, set up the tent, and had just time to crawl in when the rain thundered down. After the shower I surveyed the prospects for a show, and found six people on the wide beach, six at tea in a café, and another six strolling about. Then enormous clouds rose out of the sea, the wind blew cold and strong, and these few people disappeared. So I crawled into the tent, a disappointed man, a disillusioned romanticist, a broken reed, with the impression that Westward Ho! was a stormy deserted place; that it was not the old-fashioned place I expected, but a new affair of bungalows and builders' villas, of those melancholy, laid-out roads without any houses in them, except a lost shop or two stuck at the corner. In fact a miserable hole without a penny in it for a Punch and Judy man.

I spent the next morning in chasing a vicar, quite an unanticipated sport when I first set out to be a showman. I wanted his permission to perform in the elementary school at Northam, but he was an elusive vicar and I did not catch him. I questioned and sought until I concluded that the people of Northam were teasing me and became convinced that they do not really possess a vicar at all. And then it was my turn to be chased—by more rain—back to the

tent, where I sat for some hours expecting that the tabernacle would be broken down or blown up at any minute. But the wind and the rain struck such an exact balance that I was preserved, the hurricane being prevented from ripping up the tent by the heavy weight of rain which was holding it down. I was proud of my little tent when I came out after the storm and found the streets littered with tiles and, about fifty yards away, an astonished looking house, which, under persuasion from the wind, had foolishly deposited all its roof in the street below.

A very unnecessary and false burst of sunshine inspired me to pack up the show and climb up to Northam to perform in the street there. I arrived just in time to escape under the awning of a butcher's shop from more rain. With a raggle taggle of street urchins I wandered from the awning to doorways and arches, these boys accompanying me, urging me vociferously and not without contempt to show in the rain. It was a sodden showman that crawled into the equally sodden tent " 'atween the oats and 'taters " at Westward Ho ! that evening. But it is surprising to think how comfortable he was, with a book, a pipe, and a candle, whilst the silly elements outside exhibited such a useless ferocity.

But the first day of August brought new weather with it. After the storm there seemed more room to breathe in the world, and what a bright, new world it was that day; what a blue and purple sea with line after line of great white breakers thundering and chasing one another up the beach. All the earth was as lovely as the sea, and from time to time I wandered

from the road to climb an eminence from which I might see and enjoy this fairy scene. For one of these indulgent moments I had left the truck in the road and was seated on a five-barred gate which was screened by thick hedges. I was admiring the view and speculating on what I would buy in the town for a roadside lunch when I was suddenly aware of this dispute going on between an invisible man and woman coming down the lane.

LADY. Why ! Whatever is that ?

MAN. Dunno !

LADY. It's a Punch and Judy show.

MAN. It isn't (*immensely scornful*).

LADY. Yes, it is (*very insistent*).

MAN. 'Tisn't (*quite grumpy*).

LADY. It is (*not quite so sure*).

MAN. 'Snot (*absolutely convinced*).

LADY. I'm sure it is, Tony (*brightening up*).

TONY. I'm quite sure it's not (*just like a man*).

LADY. It's the framework of a Punch and Judy without the outside on.

At this moment the couple came in sight of the owner, sitting on the gate when the lady immediately appealed to me, and I was sorry to find that my corroboration put a terrible weapon into her hands, for she exulted over and twitted the husband unmercifully as they passed on down the road.

It had been my intention on setting out in the morning to walk to Appledore and take the ferry from there over the water to Instow, for this was Wednesday, one of the days when I might expect an audience there. But before I turned off to Appledore

I met a man who knew all about it, a dark-eyed man in a blue jersey, who surprised me with his practical insight into the matter.

"If you take my advice, mate," he said, "you'll pull it round through Bideford, and you'll find it will pay you. It's a good road it is, and you're young, and you can do a turn in Bideford on the way. If those devils on the Quay get hold of you they'll treat you like a stranger and get every penny out of you they can. Mind, I ain't blaming them—you see they've got the visitors round them now and they make them pay, and if they think you're a stranger they'll have it out of you. You go round by the road—it'll pay you every time. Of course, you can do as you like—I'm only a working man and I don't want to help those who've got too much already. Now the water people here with the money do what they like. We used to get out of the ferry on to the gravel dry shod, but now they've helped themselves to the gravel, and you'll find yourself pulling your bus across twenty yards of sand. You go round, mate; it'll pay you every time." I took his advice. Behind that rough speech there was a wealth of knowledge and intelligence respecting my affairs. I was so impressed by this dark-eyed man that rather than encounter the perils of a hundred yards by water I decided to walk the six miles to Instow round through Bideford.

By midday I was clear of the town and clambering up a bank to a shady lawn in a pine wood. Here I lunched and through the trees watched the boats go up and down the sunny river. In the quiet wood two squirrels chased one another about the trees, and

once a sparrow-hawk circled round about me, hovering, and searching for prey. It was a thrilling experience to be so near so wild a bird, to see its fierce expression, the cut of its wings, and all the markings of its handsome plumage. And I began to wonder if I would develop a character like that, for a showman, besides being an amusing dog, has to be something of a hawk, seeking out his audience upon which he can descend at the right time and carry off the pennies. A mouse amused me for some time too. It ran up and down the stems of plants looking for food, and now and again came to a standstill to look at me suspiciously.

With these little peeps into animal life and under the influence of the dreamy afternoon I quite forgot about Instow and that my show was standing out on the road ready to be pulled there. But I was stirred to action at last. There came stumbling through the bushes a man, who, having seen my truck outside the wood, had taken the trouble to search me out and to tell me excitedly that he had just sold some cattle, that consequently he had been enjoying some drinks until the public house had closed down, and that now he was on the way to a friend who had a cask of cider where he intended to complete his potations. Then he came to the thrilling news; he had just come from Instow where he had seen thousands and thousands of people arriving in carts, and having seen my show on the road he had come into the wood to tell me that I ought to be there.

I set off at once and I arrived at Instow, but not having had any cider for lunch I did not find those thousands and thousands of people on the shore, but

I found enough to encourage me to perform three times, to three convenient audiences who did not run away when the showman came round with the hat. They stood their ground; they sent children up to me with pennies, and they paid in compliments as well as in coin, which made me feel that I was receiving a just reward and not begging.

I was still a very self-conscious and indifferent collector. It is such a vague way of being paid, that where to begin or where to end in these irregular crowds was an unfathomable mystery to me. I sometimes began on the outside and sometimes on the inside, but more usually drifted about as the pennies were proffered.

At the last collection that afternoon I commenced with two old dames who immediately caught up their purses and dropped something in the hat. "Very good, I call it," said one of them, and they both smiled encouragingly. I passed to a stout, solid man who all alone had stood grinning through the whole performance. His hand came out of his trouser pocket, there was another chink in the hat, and he looked at me approvingly with twinkling eyes. Then two children ran up to me, crying, "Here, mister, here y'are," and I stooped to receive a penny from each, while in the background a fond mother nodded and smiled. A hearty, middle-aged woman leaned over the wall to reach the hat. She was a capable looking housewife, and one would imagine her more interested in nourishing recipes or bargains in the shops than in a street performance, but she wanted to know if I would be there the next day as she would like to bring some

friends. Four young workmen, sitting far away on the wall, whistled and beckoned to me, all contributing to the collection and one saying, " That's all right, mate, that is." Then several children ran up to ask when the next performance would begin, and when I said in half an hour they ran off excitedly to tell their friends and all sat down in front of the show to wait. A smiling man contributed for a little group. " Here you! we have only just come, but it was very good what we did see." I worked round from group to group back to the show and within the secrecy of the curtains counted out the results of the three collections, which was a mass of copper composed of ninety-seven pennies, thirty-five halfpennies, two threepenny pieces, and one sixpence.

I pitched my tent again next to Harmer the roundabout man, and as the next day was very wet we were thrown a good deal upon one another's company. He was sorry to hear that I was going away and would not be in Instow again. He went all over his project again of a set of swings, and so persuasively that I began to see that he wanted me for a partner—I was to buy the swings!

" You know," he said, " you ought to get married —you should get engaged. There's a good living on this beach for a girl with a pair of fortune-telling birds. They are very paying and pretty. Pretty little birds you know, and a nice girl well dressed—nothing shabby, you know—with a pair of them little birds would do well. You won't be here on Monday, will you ? But one of my daughters is coming to help me then with the lemonade. She's a good girl—she is a

one for writing letters, all about the sea and the lovely waves, and how nice it all is—pages of it—and she's clean—Oh! she's always awashing herself. Yes, she's coming to help me on Monday with the lemonade, but you'll be gone then, won't you? Hum! A pity! But you ought to get engaged."

I can tell you I went up in my own estimation after this conversation. It is not so bad to be able to make a Punch and Judy theatre and carry through some sort of a performance; but to be looked upon as something of a business proposition, to be courted by a future father-in-law, both as a partner and a son-in-law, was a degree of social respect which I hardly expected to find as an itinerant performer. I was regretful that I should not be able to see the girl. The prospect presented itself to me very favourably. I saw it all before me—the gay sight on the sunny shore, the golden sand and the blue sea. It would not be a bad life that, to be the proprietor of a juvenile set of swings, to stand about all day on the shore, to help the children in and out of the swings, to take their twopences and say, "Thank you, my dear." And all the while there would be the clean girl, well dressed, wandering about with the two pretty little love-birds telling fortunes. And in the evening while father-in-law and I pulled down the horses and the swings, and packed them under the tarpaulin, what good suppers the good girl would be cooking for us in the van among the dunes. And what a collection of pennies the three of us would have to count out each night after supper! And what a good time we would give the people for their pennies. All the fortunes would be good ones,

and father-in-law would do the children well on the horses. As for me I would know how to give the children, the little dears, long swings on those days when there were not very many about, but on the busy days it would be necessary for the swings to be shorter so that all of them could have the pleasure of spending their twopences before the day was over. But one cannot do everything in this world, and this scheme unfortunately could never materialise, for on the fatal Monday when Miss Harmer, nicely dressed, would be selling lemonade at Instow I must be at the Braunton Bank Holiday Fête and Sports. On the Friday I set out to make my way there and to see if I could find some audiences on the way.

XVIII

LURED BY CHILDREN—BACK AT SAUNTON—HOLIDAYISM—THE OLD HORSE

IT was in the evening, after passing through Barnstaple, that I was sitting on a grassy bank among the wild flowers, enjoying poet-like, the serene evening among the lovely meadows and cornlands, when I suddenly found myself surrounded by a group of curious children with two perambulators and a battered old pair of perambulator wheels. They demanded information about my conveyance, what it was and who I was, but they had never seen a Punch and Judy show and I could not make them understand. All the same, somehow or other, they got very excited. They wanted to see The Peep Show; they insisted upon seeing it, and they urged me to visit their village of Ashford, which they described as a fair-sized village, with lots of houses, a good few people, and a splendid open space outside their house where I could perform. By this time I was excited too, and shouting to them to come on, I set out along the road at the head of this cavalcade, of six children, one baby, two perambulators, and a pair of wobbly old wheels. We spread ourselves over the road and chattered along, all talking ninety to the minute. Two of the boys

were brothers, ten and twelve years of age, who had wheeled a perambulator full of garden and dairy produce into Barnstaple to sell in the market there. They were nice, frank boys, telling me how they disliked school, and how they would much rather be like me and push a show about from village to village and live in a tent.

The by-road up to Ashford was steep and rough and longer than I had expected, but eventually we arrived at the boys' house which was a nice old affair of whitewash and thatch, with a walled-in courtyard and garden, with a picturesque roofed gateway leading into it. Unfortunately as far as I was concerned there was not another house within sight, but all the same I set to work to put up the show in the roadway outside the house. Then we walked farther up the hill where we found a church and about six more cottages. We invited everyone to come and see the performance, especially Margery, a big, stout girl whose birthday it was that very day, and everyone jumped to the idea that I had arrived on purpose to celebrate the festival.

About fifteen children and adults gathered round and I set to work with the puppets. These simple folk shouted and laughed, all except the babies in arms, who cried and had to be walked up and down, while " 'Erbert," aged two years, rushed up and down in front of the show with a rattly old perambulator, playing at trains that continually let off steam and whistled with tremendous vigour. They had little pity for the poor artist, but they took up a collection when I finished and presented me with the result,

which was elevenpence halfpenny. With the help of five boys I pulled into a meadow, and I think the sight of me cooking my supper and a taste of the dish gave them more pleasure than all my artistic efforts with the puppets.

The next day being Saturday I packed up early so that I could get back to Saunton to show in the afternoon. The return to Saunton was like getting home again. The farmer welcomed me back to his orchard, and said he was glad to have me there because it would keep people from stealing his fruit. The ice-cream man and the donkey man said, "You've come back then—that's right!" and grinned cheerfully, and on my way to the shore two boys, high up on the hill above the road, came chasing down to me with golf clubs in their hands.

"Are you going to do The Peep Show on the sands? Yes? Then we are coming to see it! We were going to play golf, but now we shall come down with you," and one on either side, they helped shove The Old Encumbrance up the hill. They chatted away about their little sister who had fallen under the sea and found it all green there and had seen a big, big fish, and they told me all about their father who had seen The Peep Show and thought it very good fun. But I could not help thinking what father might have said had he seen his two young hopefuls trudging along the road with the showman. The elder boy stood through three shows that afternoon and paid his penny like a man each time. I was inclined to refuse his second and third pennies, but I managed to overcome that piece of mawkish sentimentality and in consequence

felt a horrid sneak, a hard, stony-hearted villain, a brute of a professional, cut off from ordinary, kindly human beings. But it's a rough old place, this world, when you've got your living to get.

When I reached the shore a large picnic party beckoned to me to fix up near them, as they had seen part of the performance at Instow and now they wanted to see the rest of it. And when I was setting up the theatre children came from all directions with greetings of " Hullo, Mister Peepshowman ! Hullo, Mister I chi chi chikori oni ! Where's Martha ? Where's John Barleycorn ? Will it be different or will if be the same ? Well, never mind, we don't mind seeing it all over again."

So we all felt more or less a family party in the democratic atmosphere of the sands that Saturday afternoon. There was only one person who grumbled at The Peep Show and that was a fond father who had only joined his family half an hour ago after a long absence, and whose daughter had already deserted him to watch the entertainment. And even he wanted to know all about it, and did I do different plays, and would I be there the next week. There was an attractive friendliness about all these holiday people, especially in the young man who had no change for the collection, but so obligingly went over to the stall, bought an ice in order to change his note, and returned with the ice in one hand and a whole sixpence for the hat in the other.

If I were a philosopher expounding a new theory of living, inventing a new " ism," I should call myself a holidayist, for it seems to me that the one thing the

world needs to put it right is a holiday. There is no doubt whatever about the sort of life nice people want to lead. Whenever they get the chance, what do they do but go away to the country or the seaside, take off their collars and ties and have a good time playing at childish games and contriving to eat some simple food very happily without all the encumbrances of chairs and tables. This world might be quite a nice place if only simple people would be content to be simple and be proud of it; if only they would turn their backs on these pompous politicians and ridiculous Captains of Industry who, when you come to examine them, turn out to be very stupid, ignorant people, who are simply suffering from an unhappy mania of greediness ; who are possessed with perverse and horrible devils which make them stick up smoky factories in glorious Alpine valleys, or spoil some simple country by digging up and exploiting its decently buried mineral resources ; or whose moral philosophy is so patently upside down when they attempt to persuade us that quarrelling, and fighting, and wars, or that these ridiculous accumulations of wealth are the most important, instead of the most undesirable things in life. If only simple people would ignore them and behave always in the jolly way they do on a seashore what a nice world we might have to live in.

Luckily Nature has a way with her, and we may rest assured that this wretched machine age will all be over in a few years' time. It has grown up as quickly as a mushroom, and like a mushroom it has no stability. It will die.

In the two maiden ladies who appeared that afternoon on the seashore I saw in one short half-hour the way Nature has with all artificial things, and I saw it too in the man, the superior fellow, who, standing on the margin of that lovely sea, said, " I can't make out what people come 'ere for—I can't see anything in all this," and he waved his hand carelessly over a scene that it would take a Greek poet to express in words. There is no doubt that this bright seashore rejected him as something abhorrent, and if you had seen him there on the sand in his tight boots and navy blue suit you might have believed, as I did, that some subtle power in the wind, the waves, and the sun had driven him away, and that he had not departed by the power of his own magnificent free will as he thought.

As for the two genteel ladies the forces of Nature were more kind and encouraging to them. She firmly but kindly divested them of their affected gentility. They attempted to walk down the sand banks in timid steps, but the loose sand carried them down in long slides. They tried to pick their way over the big stones, but these tumbled them from one side to the other. They laughed, they chattered, and began to move freely ; their metamorphosis was gradual, but within half an hour complete. Their elegant boots and stockings, their trim coats and neat hats were an abandoned heap on the sand, and the two ladies were actually paddling in the sea, with the wind blowing their hair loose.

Thus may all artificial things disappear. Thus, before the wholesome forces of Nature, will disappear

one day all those messy little steam engines and motor-cars that the bad-tempered Captains of Industry quarrel about and make such a mess with like so many bad boys. Then we will have a holiday and only do those happy things which are good for us.

But I suppose many strange things must happen before those charming days arrive, and that evening at the Saunton farm I saw an example of the queer change which is creeping over the countryside. The farmer was agitated by a big adventure; he had bought a motor-car and was expecting his son to arrive with it every minute.

"I lost my old horse last week," he said, "t'old Doctor, I called him. He broke his leg and I had to have 'un shot. And he was a good one too! Goo! He would goo! From Barnstaple to here in twenty-five minutes many's the time. Ah! we knew each other—me and the Doctor. He'd goo for me. He didn't need no whip. You had only to stroke a straw across his tail and up 'ud goo his head, and away he'd goo so that nothin' couldn't stop him. Yes, and so as my favourite horse was dead I bought a car. I could get another horse but 'twould never be the same as the Doctor. He might be a good 'un and goo well, but he wouldn't be the Doctor. So I thought I'd have a car. The boy has gone to fetch him home now. I had the bill this morning—three hundred and fifty I paid for him. The boy is going to learn to drive 'ee, and I'll learn from the boy. Yes, now I won't be dependent on bus or train—can coom and goo as I like. Needn't stay in market for hours when 'tain't necessary—can coom along hoome when I like."

There was consequently a sorry spectacle outside the old Devonshire farm that evening. The car had arrived and Farmer Herneman was being shown over it by the agent. It was a long, elegant grey affair which, against the heroic old waggons and the farmer's own immense figure, looked like a gimcrack toy made of tin. The agent was diving under lids and explaining the intricacies to the farmer, who, in his braces and with his riding breeches unlaced at the knees, was scratching his head in perplexity. And to everything he replied, "Oh, the boy'll learn to drive and I'll learn from 'ee."

And I imagine he would leave it to the boy to reconcile this town rat of a car to life on a Devon farm.

XIX

MONEY!—THE "FEET"—AMONG THE FAIR PEOPLE—RED HOT

A TERRIBLE feeling of respectability was coming upon me. Saunton was beginning to lose its romance and was becoming an ordinary sort of place in which I could make a living. I had been received, accepted, and set down as a possible and even desirable inhabitant of the place. I was looked upon as a person who could make some money as a business man, and was not at all encouraged to consider myself as an artist, or an amusing sort of vagabond. To my romantic eyes all we people in Saunton were so many abominable money-getting machines. The fundamental basis behind us all was—how much money? For my own part I had been very interested in the strolling photographer and his tale of large earnings; I had looked with cupidity upon the capacious toffee tin full of the ice-cream man's takings; someone had told me of a Punch and Judy man, who had accumulated seven thousand pounds by the time he died, and another money tale I had about a professor of the barrel-organ who was wealthy enough to present a beautiful bouquet of flowers every month to a lady who had befriended him. It was the money in the thing which interested us. The householders wanted to get money out of visitors. The hotels wanted money from guests, so they were trying to get rid of the huts on the dunes where delightful people lived as freely as

Robinson Crusoe. The ice-cream man was full of dodges for getting high prices, and one man drove a horse cab because it made more money than a taxi. One farmer seemed to expect crops of bank-notes from his fields and a crowd of shillings on his fruit trees, and my romantic host, the real Devon farmer in his old Devon farm, instead of singing jolly folk-songs had bought a motor-car while his wife made clotted cream on an American oil stove. As for myself I knew exactly what I was going to do during the next two weeks, and how much money I was going to make. There was the Bank Holiday Fête to begin with, then Wednesdays and Saturdays on the beach, and the Conservative Fête to finish with. There was that sort of cut-and-dried finality about it which destroys the adventure of life; that awful sense of security and comfort which wraps us in cotton-wool away from the thrilling sense of living.

Once again I found myself looking forward to the future life. In two weeks' time I would be respectable and secure no longer, for then I would turn my back on the sea and march inland across Devon, Somerset, and Gloucestershire, back to the Cotswolds. And as I began to think of the stirring life on the road romantic Saunton was romantic no longer; and those magnificent engagements at one pound apiece I began to see in a new light. Actually they were chains and fetters! They held me down to the worldly life—down to commercialism. And I began to see that one pound would not be sufficient to tie me down to one place and one date, but that I must raise my price substantially, although I could not reconcile such a rise in price with the economic laws underlying the mysteries of price and value.

In the meantime I was confronted with the Braunton Bank Holiday Fête which most people about there called " The Feet." For some weeks " The Peep Show " had been advertised on large posters, together with Swings, Hoop-la ! Coco-nut Shies, and other attractions. I was to be paid one pound for a few performances during which Red Hot, a local clown, was to act as my outside man, taking up collections for a Hospital Fund. My interest in this show was that for the time being I would be part of a Fair and would take my stand alongside real travelling showmen.

When I arrived at the field the various side-shows were receiving their finishing touches and a committeeman, very much in his Sunday clothes, conducted me across the meadow to my pitch which was between the tea tent and a cock-shy affair described as " The Prettiest Girl in the World ! Four shots a penny ! "

It was very embarrassing that at my first association with real show-people, I should be so amateurish as to allow my theatre to blow over, for a sudden gust of wind came over the hedge and stretched the erection flat on its face. But my shame was soon dispelled by the proprietor of the Fair, who came across to me and, without a word, drove into the ground an immense stake to which I could lash the show. And moreover he confessed to me that the wind was a something, particularly horrid nuisance, that three days ago it had lifted " The Prettiest Girl in the World " into the air, and deposited her, a complete wreck, fifty yards away, since which time he had worked for two days and one night in order to resurrect her for the Bank Holiday.

When the public began to drift into the field the

side-shows were ready and we were all standing at our posts in a very professional state of mind. "The boss," stout, bold, and as brown as a berry, guarded "The Prettiest Girl." Next to him came a brown young daughter at the Hoop-la! His wife dominated the coco-nuts, where she stood, a stern, hard woman, her handsome face set as if carved in mahogany, and her caste proclaimed for all the world to see by a flowing feather in the immense hat. The family was completed by a ramshackle boy dressed in a striped jersey and waistcoat; a lithe, busy boy—a foreigner—with a queer dark glint in his eyes. There was a distinct air of domination about these show-people. They seemed to glare, rather like wild animals, at the comparatively innocent country people who were roaming about the field too shy to commence spending their money. Suddenly the showman rattled his wooden balls impatiently and said to me, "They always need a little encouragement," with which he began to shout as if the show, the field, the people, and all the world belonged to him.

"'Ere, come along there! The Prettiest Girl in the World! Four shots a penny!"

The people did not come along, so he produced some cigarettes which we smoked, and the kindly old brute began to tell me how he had reconstructed his broken show. The horrible affair consisted of a wooden villa door which was surrounded by a canvas screen covered with painted bricks, with a painted window and painted curtains on either side of the door. If you felt sufficiently giddy you bought four wooden balls for a penny and with them tried to hit a spot in the middle of the door. This spot was very artfully surrounded

with a piece of loose tin which banged, and clanged, and flashed when hit, and raised in the thrower a thrilling sense of having done something. If the ball hit the magic spot the door swung open and a gruesome effigy of a female figure advanced a foot or two and then tipped backwards displaying a good deal of underclothing and two very bright garters. The thrower of the ball " 'ad a packit of fags " and a coarse guffaw with whistles and cat-calls arose from the lads, but I will say this for the Devonshire lasses that most of them blushed and turned away disgusted. I began to see that my work of reformation must not stop at the " Punch and Judy," but that I would have to take a complete Fair by the scruff of its neck and put it into proper artistic order. What an attractive work it would be for an Arts and Crafts Movement, to produce a Fair really charming and gay. And not only to make it but to travel about with it and create for us the delightful fairy-tale atmosphere which should surround a Fair.

But I suppose that Fairs are in their decadence. They have a serious rival nowadays in Summer Schools, where people gather together from all over the world to get in a yearly supply of knowledge instead of a supply of cloth, or household commodities. I suppose the side-shows of the future will be correspondingly intellectual. In a gay booth we shall find ourselves confronted with Algebraical Problems, and if we succeed in solving the set, we shall be rewarded with a free copy of Dr. Dote's *History of Algebra*. Instead of the boxing booth we shall gather round a debate on some highly controversial and inflammable

subject, and instead of the boat swings we shall be levitated at twopence apiece by a Spiritualistic magician.

Meanwhile the Braunton Fête developed. More and more people surged into the field, and bold spirits were making their coat-tails fly in the swing-boats. The band began to play and I saw that I was in for a gay time; once more The Peep Show had carried me into cheerful surroundings, and I roamed about the field enjoying the Maypole dancing, the races, and the shows and admired, in the broad effect, the flying flags, the bustle and animation of the people.

I was standing at my theatre waiting for my turn to come when I suddenly heard the loud ringing of a bell and saw, breaking through the crowd of people, my outside man, the clown Red Hot. He was a tall figure dressed in a bright cretonne costume, with his face painted carmine and a black and a white diamond covering his respective eyes. He clanged the bell and strode towards The Peep Show. He shouted in a voice already hoarse, " 'Ere, come along 'ere. I got something to show you. Come and see something what's almost as funny as me. 'Ere, come along 'ere." His magic personality, or his experience as a recruiting sergeant, for that is what he had been, soon collected a good crowd, and it was not long before he was exhorting me to " Get on wiv' it."

I plunged into the performance and shouted my loudest so that the scattered, restless crowd could hear. But in a few minutes the brass band began to play, and a tied-up dog began to howl. I shouted louder still and animated the puppets with extra vigour in order to dominate the racket, but then Red Hot began to collect,

which was quite a performance in itself, and I found the puppets abandoning their usual orderly performance and "showing off" to this rackety crowd in a medley of violent "slapstick." Very shortly the perspiring, carmine face of the clown appeared through the curtains and said "'Ere—close darn! That's enough! I've swept up that lot," and what the puppets might be doing seemed of so little importance that I pulled down the figures at once without so much as a bow to the audience.

After a third performance the clown introduced me to the tea tent, where I was served with an enormous tea generous enough for a policeman or a fireman, but I suppose in an affair like this a showman ranks with these. After the tea I was dismissed; my day at the Fête was over. I drew away from the eternal swinging of boat-swings and the cacophonous crowd with the firm conviction that the first essential for a showman at a Fair is a set of invincible nerves.

In the town on my way to the camp I encountered another wandering showman. We came together where two roads meet and of course we passed the time of day. He inquired if I had had a good day, and after I had asked the same of him we came to a standstill. I am sure we made a picturesque group there in the old-fashioned street, for this showman was a curious figure, wearing a tall, grey hat and a red waistcoat decorated with silver buttons. And he was not alone. He was pushing a perambulator disguised and decorated under a riot of red, yellow, green, and blue spots of paint. Behind him strutted a pair of respectable goats. A piebald pony walked on one side of the gay vehicle, while two old English sheep-dogs

shambled along at the other. While he was talking to me and saying how he had set out to entertain a lot of motor-cars at a certain place, but, unfortunately, " rot 'em," the motor-cars had not appeared, I became conscious of a tugging at my supper loaf which I was carrying under my arm. One of the respectable looking goats had belied his appearance, and when I turned round was ignominiously chewing a piece of the bread to which he had helped himself. The other goat fixed a wild eye upon me immediately and then, rearing up, placed its two fore paws affectionately on my chest. I gave him a piece of the bread whereupon the two dogs propped themselves upon my person in a similar manner, and the pony, who had already got wind of something going on, whinnied a hint across the perambulator. My loaf swiftly disappeared between them with the help of the rabbits, discovered in the perambulator, and a marvellous Japanese talking bird which looked to me exactly like a very ordinary old cock-a-lorum. In return for the loaf, then and there in the High Street the old chap made his animals perform, his dogs leaping on the pony's back, and the pony running round the perambulator. The goats did not perform ; they simply lent an air of respectability to the cavalcade.

I admired the animals, and I admired the decorations on his perambulator, at which the showman's eyes gleamed and he pressed me to come and see him, in a butcher's yard where he was camping, when he would show me something which would please me still more. So I accepted the invitation, shook hands with the goats, bought another loaf, and returned to bury myself in the gracious quietness of the orchard.

XX

SAUNTON DAYS—AN OLD SHOWMAN—THE COUNTY FÊTE

A GOOD many people came down to Saunton Sands in those August days, and by working hard and performing until I croaked all my parts like a crow I was able to collect the amusing amounts of eleven shillings and elevenpence halfpenny, ten shillings and tenpence halfpenny, and eight shillings and ninepence halfpenny, on the two Wednesdays and the Saturday. I also collected more compliments from the audiences, except on one unfortunate day when the show instigated a serious argument between a youth and two young ladies. The young man gave a very logical and enthusiastic case as to why "The Peep Show" was better than a "Punch and Judy," but the ladies, and this is quite true, for it all took place just outside my curtains, would have none of his oratory and completely closed the discussion, and brutally snubbed him together with the show, by saying defiantly, fiercely and unanswerably, "Well, never mind, it isn't then!"

And I was snubbed again by a very assured and much travelled young miss of six, who said, "In Africa, where I was, these things are done better than this. I was in a shop there and the man had a dolly, a black one, and it moved its mouf' and really spoked."

There were amusing moments too in the orchard, especially when there was performed before me the classic drama of a boy stealing the fruit. A small boy he was with the monstrous confidence of a man of forty. He carefully guarded against my interference by announcing himself as a nephew of the farmer's, and that he had only come to get an apple. As guardian of the fruit I suggested that the apples were not ripe, but he assured me that he knew all the trees, the sweet from the sour, and which were ripe at this time of year. Getting his apple was a surprisingly strenuous business, for after he had left me I was alarmed by a riot among the trees, by branches crashing and twigs snapping, of rustlings and rattlings, and such bumps and thumps of apples and stones falling to the ground, that I crawled out of my tent in consternation. But I was very relieved to find that the farmer had been alarmed too, that he was jumping over the orchard gate, that in a few swift strides he was up with the boy, who was no longer confident or a nephew, but a sorry urchin emptying out of his pockets and other recesses a large number of unripe apples called " Glisteners," the pride of the orchard.

And I did not forget the old showman and all his animals ; he proved a revelation, for not only was he a brother mountebank, but also a brother philosopher, an oracle in a red waistcoat, through whom the strangled voice of Nature was struggling to express itself. I found him in the butcher's yard where for the time being he and his family were lodged. As soon as he saw me he began to say : " I've got something to show you. I've done something that I think you will

be pleased with. It's a thing I should like to show you." We spoke to the pony tethered to a post, teased the two goats tied up in a cart shed, and then I was mysteriously invited to come round the corner and see the " something." My expectations so carefully raised, I went round the corner and was confronted with the oddest, the lowest, the most comic and old-fashioned little pony shay imaginable. It must have been a relic of some circus, a thing for clowns, an odd affair made for a human being certainly, and yet, standing against it, we seemed enormous. He had patched up the vehicle with odd pieces of zinc and had decorated it with his own inimitable painting which might be described as the impressionist section of fair and circus decorative art. I asked him if he intended riding in it himself or what he was going to do with it.

" Do ! " he exclaimed, " I haven't done anything yet, but I've got it all in my hands and I'm going to do it. There's Lady So-and-So, she is going to help me, and the vicar says he wants to see my animals. And Mr. So-and-So, he's a dean you know, I've got him, and I've got all the big people—all the ladies, the lords, and the gentlemen—ah ! and the policemen, the constables, they all know me. Oh! I'm going to do something, but, you see, I've had a bad foot and 'aven't done anything yet. But it's all in my hands."

In a series of variations now fast, now slow, he continued upon this theme. It was a mad composition, a tragic monody, a garrulous and gloomy soliloquy, which the crazed old man uttered there in the untidy yard; a tale threaded with the deaths of pretty ponies, of clever dogs, of being presented with a mayor's silver

buttons, with the tragedy of a bad foot. It was only broken by my asking if he had always been a showman.

" No, sir," he said. " I'm a land worker; I used to have an acre or two of land in Oxfordshire. Look here, I'll show you something—I'll show you what I am. This is what I believe," and he lead me off to the cart shed where the goats were tethered. From underneath a tarpaulin he produced a Bible and an exercise book, and laying aside the Bible, he opened the paper book, and said:

" Now this is my business—you shall see. It is all written down there—read it—read it ! "

I took the book and this is what I read all written out in a clear copper-plate writing, some large and some small, with here and there a long, old-fashioned s, with mistakes in spelling and with scarcely any punctuation.

FIRSTLY THE LABOUR
&
THE LAND

THE BACK BONE OFF OUR NATION. To give all serve all pay all & feed all really abused blasphemed & despised.

Second put back on the land these mentioned animals the HORSE & the OXON. Not moter ploughs in future years they will starve England to death.

2. Train up the younger generation to do as i have done at 14 years old to plough & sow & reap & mow & be a farmers boy.

3. Give every working man an acre of the uncultivated land to break up & if an industrious & working man assist that man in his first year 12 months of labour iff a bad season again assist them the land would soon be brought under cultivation then our England would abound in every prosperity and plenty for all and the Lord would bless the increase

REMBER

All Good gifts around us
Are sent from Heaven above
Thank the Lord then
For all his love.

ALBERT HENRY AKERS
BUZE NORTON
OXFORDSHIRE.

So it seemed that I was not the only wandering showman who was inspired upon the subject of the Simple Life, and this was not the first time that I had come across the sentiment in a professional agriculturist. Several times I had caught snatches of it from farmers and farm labourers. There was the old chap with whom I sheltered in a barn, who had criticised the field which lay before us.

" See that field—ploughed by a tractor," he said scornfully. " You can always tell when a tractor's done 'em—they go so patchy and that weedy."

And I remembered the dozen other countrymen who had talked with equal scorn and to the same effect; criticising tractors, corrugated iron, factory cider, and mechanical binders which ruin the straw and knock out the grain. They even criticised modern maids and the master farmers themselves, whom they accused of riding to dances in motor-cars instead of going out into the " vields and pulling oop th' water maids." I am quite sure they are right, these sterling old workers, for the only inspiration behind any modern machine is " making a fortune," which is

greediness, and doing things with less trouble, which is laziness. And the tragedy is that neither of these vile things is realised and all right craftsmanship has disappeared.

The showman and I muddled our way through a glorious discussion out of which emerged from me the declaration that I was a Punch and Judy man because that at least was work for a man to do, and that I defied any machine to rival me at the job. The old chap chuckled, pleased. We were pleased with one another and he was anxious that I should join with him, that we should travel about together, and with each other's help make a lot of money. He was interested in the business side, but to me it seemed we might have become a pair of Troubadours or Jongleurs that we might have wandered about expressing through our performances and way of living, the joy and gaiety, the healthiness and brightness of The Simple Life and so have turned the World from the Error of its ways. But actually I began to hum and haw at his suggestion, explaining that I would like to join with him, but owing to circumstances was not quite able to do so. It was difficult enough to get about with a company of puppets, but it seemed to me a nightmare to travel about the country with two goats, two dogs, a pony, some rabbits, a Japanese talking bird, and a ludicrous little pony shay. So we shook hands and we parted.

This encounter, the friendliness of the audiences on the seashore, the kind taxi-drivers who gave me lifts in their empty cars, and the fine weather, made these two weeks at Saunton more romantic than I

expected, and the day came swiftly upon me, the last professional day on the coast when I was to perform at the Conservative Fête.

Early on the Saturday morning a car, which already seemed completely filled with ladies and various impedimenta connected with the fête, drew up outside the orchard gate, and I, being there ready, immediately strapped my boxes on the carrier, wriggled the poles in among the ladies, and wriggled myself in, ragged coat, dusty shoes and all. This was a great moment; here was Punch being honoured in a new way, to be lifted from the road and carried away in a motor-car full of ladies to the county fête.

In Barnstaple we stayed at Brooks to buy sausage rolls and then we drove out to Tavistock to the Tower Field, an immense pasture, high up in the world, with, whichever way we looked, Academy Pictures of the surrounding county; with a pleasant, all-over view of Barnstaple, its bright houses and silver waters, and the rolling country beyond. We, the concert party, commandeered a marquee originally designed to be the babies' Crèche; we filled it with chairs, set up "The Peep Show," hung up our posters, and then lunched. And while we lunched (I pretending to eat my sausage roll but slipping it surreptitiously into a pocket) we conversed about food and what was our sustenance whilst we were hunting. One young lady saying she ate nothing at all, and the man confessing that his favourite diet was whisky. I could not give any hunting experience, but as a Punch and Judy man I advocated abstemiousness whilst working, and I practised it that day for all the lunch I got was

cake and a bright yellow fluid called Soda and Lime Juice Cordial.

The fête was ceremoniously opened and "the platform" made a tour of the stalls and shows, finishing up with our tent. A real General took the tickets and it was not long before I was deep in a performance to the assembled "county." The ladies said: "How sweet." I overheard a deep voice say: "This *is* rich." The military gentlemen laughed at the Boxing Match, and they one and all applauded after the scenes; so that I could say truthfully after the show that my little puppets had risen to the occasion, to their new responsibility of amusing "the Quality."

The puppets worked hard all the afternoon and evening until the fête was over and all the people went away. We packed up in a dream world of tiredness, of twilight and moonlight, purred our way through country lanes, through Barnstaple and Braunton to Saunton, until, at a late hour, I tumbled out of the car at the orchard gate, when I threw away the sausage roll, crawled into the tent and had something to eat.

XXI

OFF FOR THE COTSWOLDS—TWO LABOURERS—SWIMBRIDGE

FARMER HERNEMAN proved to be a good barometer. If it had not been for the aching of his legs as he lay in bed that Monday morning, I would have travelled away from Saunton into a dismal morning of rain. But he knew it was going to rain; it always did when his legs ached "all down here" in that particular manner. So I took the warning of his intelligent limbs and did not pack up the camp.

It accordingly rained all the morning and I sat in the tent studying the map, and measuring the length of road from Barnstaple to that terminating point in the Cotswolds where my Punch and Judy career would end for the summer. As far as I could judge, the distance across Devon, Somerset, and along the Cotswolds from Bath to Stroud was about one hundred and fifty miles. A distance which I wished to cover in about twenty days, earning my living as I went along.

Allowing for interruptions of bad weather, interesting delays, lazy moments, and reflective cigarettes, I would have to travel quickly. I carefully arranged the stages for each day, deciding where I would show

and collect pennies, and where I would camp, an occupation which passed away the rainy morning very pleasantly, but which, as an experienced mountebank, I knew well enough was of no practical value. I was only impressed with the idea that I must travel quickly and that I must start as soon as possible. In spite of the farmer's prophetic legs there was some promise of fair weather and I prepared against a fine afternoon by eating a large, early lunch, and in shaking hands with the family Herneman. They wished me a good journey and they hoped that they would see me again the next summer, camping in their orchard and performing on the sands, an invitation any wandering showman might be pleased and proud to receive.

The weather cleared and in the afternoon I was on the road making my way through Braunton and getting as far as Ashford, a distance of seven miles, before rain fell again. Here I pitched the tent in the cottagers' field where I had camped before, but instead of performing I entertained the children to supper in the tent, and introduced them for the first time in their lives to wholemeal bread. "If I was you," said one of the boys, "I shouldn't get that. We always buy white. I like that. I don't 'arf eat it," and I was sorry to think of these peasant children trying to sustain their rough lives on the dainty bread invented for genteel old ladies to nibble.

The mother of the family came down to the tent with her baby. The children had deserted her for the camp and her husband was away. She was not able to stay in the house by herself so she came into

the tent with the rest of the family. My little house suffered a precarious half-hour. Literally it bulged with visitors, and what with the baby smacking the thin fabric and the boys rolling over one another I was relieved when they all went off to bed.

I discovered the husband later in a wood shed. He and a friend were leaning against the logs and there, in the mud and the gathering darkness, they were railing against the world. I suppose the damp shed and the smell of mouldy wood fitted their mood, but I wondered why they did not take their rest in the house which seemed decent enough. By their conversation they were in a gloomy state of mind and they reminded me of the man I once met who always relieved his low spirits by locking himself in a dark coal cellar and playing a concertina for an hour or two.

These two men were grumbling about modern traffic. Being farm labourers they still used horses and they were sorry for the animals having to get about on the smooth roads with the high camber. " There's no peace nowadays for a horse on the road—'tis nervous all the time. They cars pass up and down all day long and where they gets the money from I doan't know."

This led them into discussing the " idle rich," not in a vague theoretical way, but in the person of a local butcher of the town, who no longer lives in rooms over the shop, but flaunts a car and a private house in the country. " He doan't do much work. He just sits round and pays the assistants to do that—not that he gives them much, but what it is has to come out of

we. Why, he makes a good living out of the heads, the hides, and the offals alone, and then makes big profits on the meat. 'Tis the same all over and they get it all out o' the likes of we. And all these Government affairs have to be paid for. That four hundred a year, all the officials, inspectors, tax collectors, and the like have to be paid for. 'Tis all Government money says some, but they arn't got no gump, it all has to come out of we. Taxes is like a rise in wages. If you get a rise through a strike the prices of things goes up. If more taxes is passed like there is more money paid for getting them in. But there, 'tis all taken out of our hands and it seems like we can't do nothing. Houses now! If only they'd let we get at the stone us 'ud soon put up a cot to live in, wouldn't us, 'Arry?"

"Ah," said 'Arry, "but then there's this sanitary inspector as 'ud make you do it a certain size and mess you up wi' his regulations. He doan't interfere wi' the big houses and make them build 'em smaller but 'tis to us 'e comes worryin'."

For a long time, in the dark, to the accompaniment of dripping rain, these two labourers, in sober language, covered the whole field of social life; and in these dismal surroundings it seemed to me that there was no greater tragedy in the world than the poverty of these decent men who grow all our food without which we could not live.

"'Tis no use talkin', and as I can't buy no 'bacca nowadays may as well go to bed," said the man dolefully, putting away an empty pipe which he had been sucking. We all said good night and disappeared into

the darkness and the rain to leave the problem of life to settle itself and to grub about with our own little practical affairs.

Had I been one of those clever people who plan, organise, and arrange perfectly their future life I would have been very irritated in passing through Barnstaple the next morning. All my strait-laced plans would have suffered from a direct counter-plot on the part of the rain, but as it was, with a free mind, Barnstaple proved the most convenient place. To ignore or run away from the roughness of Nature is an unhappy business, but to take one's place in the rough and tumble of the elements—why, in a word—it is the Art of Life. The passage through the town was a series of showers, and a series of happy miracles. When the first rain fell there was a thick clump of trees ready to hand. At the second shower I was passing the Barley Mow Inn and an open shed in the yard kept me dry. From the inn I walked as far as a coffee shop, and after the good coffee I progressed during a dry interval to the Athenæum. A window blind saved me from the next downpour; a doorway was my last refuge, and after that I walked up the hill on the Taunton Road to a high meadow, to a lunch under the hedge and a view, wide and lovely, over the county to the sea. In the language of the country I felt a proper tramp, and all through that lunch, which I ate out of several paper bags, a tramp philosophy evolved itself within me. That is the way to get through life, said the still, small voice. Take the plunge after the ideal, and if your ideal is good enough, all will be well. And I saw myself strolling

through the world in a Utopian state of mind, carrying Utopia with me everywhere, and sheltering from all the metaphorical showers of life under convenient, metaphorical window blinds.

Later in the day I wandered into the white village of Swimbridge. It was just the right time for a show and I knocked at the policeman's cottage to ask his permission. His wife opened the door and explained that her husband was on his holidays, but she thought I might do my entertainment on the Feoffee's plot of ground by the bridge. A policeman on his holidays is not a thing to make one's blood run cold and I began setting up the show. But before I was ready he appeared, that constable, in his holiday clothes, and requested that I would make no disturbance or cause no obstruction. However, this was only a subterfuge. Behind his official demeanour was a decent human desire to know when the show would begin as he wished to bring his wife and children to see it.

Village children are always noisy, but there are none noisier than the children of Swimbridge. They laughed and shouted at the puppets so continuously that the dialogue had to be chopped and cut to fit in with all their squeals. The policeman and his family were there ; an old lady locked up her shop and stood through the show, and a passing motor-car drew up and made part of the audience. But the greater part were children, noisy children, who after the performance, made a bold attempt to see the works inside and had to be spoken to very severely. These wild animals kept their distance until I was packed ready for travelling, but while I was adjusting

a back strap four of the boys were harnessed, as horses, by a fifth boy to the front of the conveyance. The four horses began to pull and the strap was torn from my hands; the other children surrounded the vehicle, and away went all my worldly goods up the stiff hill at a smart trot, obscured and buried by some thirty boys and girls all shouting and shrieking.

With difficulty I stopped them at the first farm-house while I inquired if I might camp there for the night. The permission was refused and with a delighted shout the children set off again, tugging my property up the hill. At the hill-top, almost a mile from the village, I sent the children away, but they would not go until I had promised to give them a show every day or at the very least every Saturday. By this time it was dark. I reached a farm which was shut up and guarded by what Punch would call " a nashty dog " so I walked on. Large drops of rain began to splash on my hands and face and thunder rumbled in the distance. This was no time for polite inquiries as to camping. At the first gate I pulled up, and throwing my things over into the field set up the tent in the dark, crawled in and fell asleep, I knew not where, with the rain roaring on my roof like an express train. But I fell asleep quickly, for I had spent a busy day, travelling over eight miles of hilly road, performing and collecting four shillings and twopence.

XXII

SOME DIARY AND ACCOUNTS

IT is always an adventure to read another person's diary, and sometimes it is entertaining too. Pepys and Evelyn are so interesting because we seem to be overhearing a real person speaking his private thoughts. None of us would look deliberately into a diary and none of us would put our ears intentionally to the keyhole, but how thrilled, how pleased we are, and how ashamed, how embarrassed but how alive, when we do overhear a private confession or get an accidental glance at a hidden mystery.

All this time " The Peep Show " had been keeping a diary, which had been written up at many odd times and in many queer places. I had often sat under a hedge and used my hat as a writing desk; I had written in early mornings while waiting for the kettle to boil, or sometimes it had served to relieve a restless night in the tent. Sometimes the writing was large and sometimes small ; there was blue ink and black ink, and that horrid, unsightly period when I attempted to use a shilling fountain pen. There were pages fair and pages blotted by rain drops ; and here and there crumbs, flies, pieces of tobacco, or cheese, had got squashed in between the leaves. At times two or three days' adventures were recorded altogether in a line and sometimes, in order to pass the time, the entries

were long and detailed. But usually it was brief, and if we allow the diary to tell the tale of the next few days we shall get over a quiet time quickly and preserve the continuity of the journey.

Wednesday, August 22nd.

Squish! Squish! The confounded rain has trickled under the tent, and every time I move it squishes like a sponge. Weather this morning still juicy—out at six in search of drinking water. Walked all round farm but people not up. Lonely old farm, securely fortified with iron-studded door in surrounding wall. Waited, and whistled, and roamed about until I heard footsteps clattering across the yard, and the pump working vigorously. Rattled the latch and a girl opened up. Got water, and milk, and eggs, and a horrid stench of pig corpse, which, in order to disguise it, is being cooked. Breakfasted in the tent secure from various storms. On the road by eleven—wind behind—travelled up and down easily, enjoying the stormy walk. Passed through an interminable private estate and saw an enormous palace. Why should one live in a large place like that! With all its luxury I would rather have my Punch and Judy. This gipsy life gives one plenty of cheek—feel quite sorry for the aristocratic owner, poor chap. Handsome park scenery and pretty thatched cottages, but no good for a showman or a camper. Talked with Welsh miner. Poor man been gassed in the war—has to work out of doors for thirty shillings a week and regrets his four or five pounds weekly as a miner. He admires my wander house and keeps reiterating, " Eh! That's

a good idea now!" Lunched on a green glade by a stream under three oak trees, and left a pound of plums behind. Passed thro' South Molton. Early closing day—place shut up—deserted. Failed to get a camp and travelled on. Met cheerful tramp making for workhouse. He designs an itinerary for me. Says there is nothing much ahead for me—road to Bampton deserted, nothing but a switchback for seventeen miles! Evening too rainy for a show. Camped in a field by Bish Mills. Three young Cockneys on a cycle and camp tour tumbled into the field about nine o'clock. Their first experience of camping—thought it too much like hard work. "O the 'ills!" they exclaimed. And wer'n't they excited to see real live rabbits running about! "There's one! There's another! Look at 'em! Cor, there's 'undreds of 'em!" They could not have been more excited had they seen Bath buns and glasses of milk scampering round. They were not pleased with cycle touring. "O the 'ills—the bloomin' 'ills!" Slept well and travelled eight miles.

Thursday, August 23rd.

Got away while the Cockneys were breakfasting. Weather dirty and ridiculous, but feel I must knock off some of the seventeen miles to Bampton which are to be so barren of villages and pennies. Two miles on the cycle campers pass me. In five minutes they have descended a hill and are a mile away three black dots disappearing over a ridge. What a speed to travel at! The seventeen miles will be a small matter to them. I trudged along. The road wilder and more lonely.

A few farms in sight—the brown and purple moorland of Exmoor in the distance. No villages. Passed a solitary cottage, its back turned to the road with a shyness common to lonely things. Lovely, open lonely road, winding over, and up and down the hills. No one there but myself and the birds—sometimes a horse. At midday spots of rain fell. Put up tent in a rough field and lunched. Rain come to stay. Pulled truck through ditch and over a turf bank into field. Packed belongings in tent. Feet and trouser legs very wet so got into sleeping-sack and smoked and read Homer. Marked position on map, six and a half miles from Bampton, and darned socks. Heavens! What—larks! How it rained all the afternoon! Sheets of rain drifting across the barren moor. At five o'clock it slacked a bit. Roamed out for water and provisions. Found a pretty shop in Anstey and enjoyed stretching my legs after four hours in the tent. On the way back the rain got enthusiastic and bags of it went down my neck and into my shoes. It soaked through and drenched me. The sodden tent under the dripping hedge and the wet grass all around looked a miserable shelter, and I so wet and cold. But took off my clothes, slipped in sleeping-sack, and had a great adventure inventing a new supper dish of onions, crumbled bread, milk, lentil flour, salt, cheese and eggs. Made two goes of it. Read more Homer, and smoked, and cut toe-nails. Went to sleep early with the telegraph wires moaning and the wind hissing through the bushes in a melancholy crescendo. This night am an abandoned man on the haunted moor.

Friday, August 24th.

Awakened early by sunlight and larks singing. No more rain sweeps over the grey landscape in ghostly clouds. The moor that was so dismal yesterday is now bright with heather and wild scabious. Have spread out all my things to dry in the sun. A pink quilt, a crimson sleeping-sack, a green bucket, my boots, hat, socks, and shirt, all hung over the blue framework. What a jumble sale! Got dried and on the way by twelve. Soon came to rich, wooded country which seems very luxurious after the barren, windy heath by Anstey. Made for Bampton—all my hope in Bampton. Imagine it to be a delightful place and am drawn pleasantly on. Rested on Oakford Bridge and enjoyed the wild river and the wooded slopes. Stiff pull to a hill-top and find a descent there into Bampton about a mile away. How pleasantly the old town received me. Gently down hill all the way, with seats, and sunshine, and a glorious landscape of hills and old farms. A crusty church tower appeared through the trees and a rugged roof or two. A turn in the road and I was there—in the Bampton of my dreams. A real country town of wide streets, of old cottages, and picturesque bits of slums. The inns bright and clean; some of the older houses with carved timbers and elaborately panelled doors. A real country town enjoying a decent old age.

The policeman was out but his wife and children did not object to a show in the streets. Took tea in a modest shop and talked to cheerful old proprietor who was anxious to see show. After tea set up outside his shop and got a small crowd round. After this show

set off with his compliments and one and six gathered in, to perform in the Square which of course was a triangle before the White Horse Inn. Show went well to a good crowd until suddenly the town went dark and my voice was lost in a confusion of shouts and uproar. Was it an avalanche? A sudden deluge? O no! Only a char-à-bancs, a lovely little affair in primrose and red, which had shoved my crowd away and drawn up outside the inn. Collected four and sixpence halfpenny. Got a camp and milk at a wandering old farm a mile out of town. Fine moonlight night. Travelled eight miles.

Saturday, August 25th.

Full of beans this lovely morning. Such blue morning mists in the valleys, such golden sunlight brightening all the hills and the tree tops. The road went up and down between the hedges and under trees, past whitewashed cottages and farms, past fields full of cattle and gardens full of flowers, until at midday I crossed the boundary between Devon and Somerset. This seemed like progress to be out of Devon on the fifth day, and the road turning northwards towards the Cotswolds. Plodded on thro' lovely hilly and wooded country. Pulled up the water road towards Wiveliscombe, and at the top of the hill turned a corner and found all the county of Somerset beneath me. The town of Wiveliscombe in the middle distance with farms, and fields, and the Quantocks surrounding it. A peach of a scene! Lively with detail and bright with colour. Like a charming toy with shapely hills painted green, and little painted animals in the fields.

Sat in a wood sheltering from rain. A policeman cycling along the road beneath dropped a parcel on the road. Thinking himself alone he swore dreadfully as he dismounted to pick it up. A steep hill rolled me into Wiveliscombe and the first thing I did was to buy some vegetables. Was served by a stout party, a regular, rough, middle-aged washerwoman—a Mrs. Gamp—a real, honest, no nonsense about her, motherly, working class sort of person, who, of all people in the world, camps, with enthusiasm, in a tent by the sea at Blue Anchor. Every week-end she goes and enjoys it and don't mind if it does rain. On the strength of our mutual passion she made me a present of sufficient vegetables for a stew and wished me Good Luck! Found a friendly farmer outside the town who showed me all the best sites for a tent about his farm and I set up in a sheltered pasture green and clean. After some tea went back to town with show. Got permission from a decent police sergeant and set up in the square. In spite of a mizzle of rain got a crowd, and performed, and collected four and sixpence halfpenny. Same amount as at Bampton. A whiskered old chap bent over a walking stick said, "You gie' I the best larf I 'ad fur many a year." Packed up and back to camp pretty wet. Travelled thirteen miles.

Sunday, August 26th.

Painted wheels. Loafed round field and made friends with a dog. Explored lanes in afternoon and came back to find my new friend, the dear little spaniel, had worried one loaf to crumbs and was commencing on

another. Visitors at farm very lively, throwing open all the windows, banging on the piano, singing that sort of gay song which makes one miserable, and smoking cigarettes in long holders. Talked with them, but they openly deride camping and walking—something to guffaw at in contempt. Climbed hill towards Fitzhead and got grand view over the county to Taunton. Expect level roads for a change and hope to travel quickly.

Monday, August 27th.

Showery but brilliant morning. Gathered mushrooms in field and fried them for breakfast. While eating them in the tent two fellows wandered about the meadow saying, " Funny there ain't no mushrooms this morning. Can't understand it ! " Took the road at nine-thirty and enjoyed walking through hilly Somerset. Milverton, pretty with its red houses covered with creepers and berried climbers, and its quaint cobbled pathways. Drank cider at Norton Fitzwarren and in such an old dog of a place felt that I was wandering into mediæval times. The historic atmosphere of this part of the county dominates, and a passing motor-car looked strange, unreal, and out of the picture. Two miles from Taunton decided to camp but was soon in thick of the town and showers of rain. Left truck at The King's Arms and explored Taunton, reducing my collection of coppers in the shops and " the pictures." Too wet to perform in Taunton and pulled away through the showers, with half a dozen boys accompanying me and trying to persuade me to show in the rain, they being so anxious to see a Punch and Judy. Got tent up at Bathpool in a dry interval. Cuss the rain !

At the end of the diary, from the strictly gipsy point of view, I had committed a dastardly crime. I had ruled some columns and kept a strict record of the finances of Peep-showing. A distinct feeling of coldness grew up between myself and this record, for whenever a fat, chinking bag of coppers was urging me to jolly extravagances, to indulge in buns, in a pot of jam, or an evening at the pictures, this record always made things very unpleasant by whispering to me in its still, small voice. I never knew such a skinflint, such a cold, calculating old killjoy as this financial record, but for this particular week, as you may see, Mr. Debit triumphed easily over Mr. Credit.

Cr.	£	s.	d.	Dr.	£	s.	d.
23 Too Wet				23 Bread, milk, raisins, tea, cheese		2	3
24 Show at Bampton		4	6½	24 Bread, milk, tomatoes		1	5
25 Show at Wivelscombe		4	6½	25 Bread (once again), milk, butter, fruit, vegs., CAKE (Saturday night)		2	7
26 Sunday				26 Milk (good day for %)			4
27 Wet				27 Bread (as usual), vegs.			4½
				CINEMA (shocking)		1	0
				CIDER, CIGARETTES, CAKE (all unnecessary but very good)		1	7½
				Map, stamps, matches		1	6½
28 No luck				28 Grub, candle			10
29 More rain				29 Bread (goes on for ever), grub, rent for pitch (absurd)		3	6
		9	1			15	5½

XXIII

SIGHING FOR ADVENTURES—THE ISLE OF ATHELNEY—I WALK INTO THE PAST—THE ENCHANTED CASTLE OF GLASTONBURY

I WAS not getting enough adventures. The quiet county and the bad weather were forcing me too much upon my own company, and when I thought of the steady stream of encounters which are related in famous books of adventures I grew envious and exasperated.

When Don Quixote wandered about employing an old-fashioned craft, good things were always coming his way; but of course he was written up by Cervantes, and Rosinante and Sancho were always on hand to fill up the gaps.

When George Borrow travelled as a tinker his encounters were many, but then, he had the advantage of travelling when the roads were thick with pedestrian wanderers. In his days people walked about on their feet and travelling tradesmen journeyed slowly by pony or donkey cart. But if I saw anything on the roads it would be a motor-car, an impersonal affair with its occupants hidden away behind polished wood and glass, or obscured in weird costumes. Knife grinders,

ice-cream men, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, all of whom should have been my companions, flew past me in cars; I began to suspect even beggars and tramps of getting about in motor contrivances.

I was undoubtedly the last of the pedestrians. I found myself more Quixotic than the Don himself, for I was wandering on foot in a world of cars, cycles and flying machines—a handicraftsman lost in an unapproachable, mechanical world. If I did pick up with a chance acquaintance it was to expose myself to searching questions as to who I was, where did I come from, and how much money did I make. I suffered a nervous reaction. I was wandering romantically where there was no romance. I could come across no one but deadly serious business people who all knew how I ought to conduct my business and make it pay.

But I was not looking for business. I was looking for happy audiences and some simple hospitality. That was my right and the right of my gay little friends, my company of puppets. Was I not a wandering showman carrying with me wherever I went a boxful of concentrated cheerfulness and brightness! When I set up my theatre and let out the puppets did I not exhibit a world where everyone was gay and everyone danced! Was I not always hard at work collecting, and storing up happy moments which my puppets knew how to express and pass on to other people! I was a dispeller of gloom—not a business! I have always marvelled at the foolishness of business people. They understand nothing of this elusive world. They could not comprehend "The Peep Show" to the slightest degree. They have no intelligence, or, if they have it

they are afraid of it. They cannot even make money without running into strikes or a costly war which allows war speculators to make off with their gains. They are even foolish enough to die just when they are richest. They are hopeless! How many bold-as-brass, slap-dash, know-everything young fellows have given me such ridiculous advice as this. First, to spend one hundred pounds, which I do not possess, on a motor-car. Second, to mount the car, which I could not drive, and dash about the country, flying past all the places where I would find a good audience. Thirdly, rush off to some large seaside town, where, they have not considered, I would find a flourishing Punch and Judy already in existence. They are entirely hopeless these business, people—the most incorrigible of visionaries.

Immersed in the enjoyment of these gloomy and bilious thoughts I got over a good deal of ground until I suddenly woke up and found myself in a village—but was it a village, a modern village, or had I, somehow or other, unaccountably wandered back into earlier times?

A strange old church-tower rose above me, and at its base were timbered houses and farm-sheds. There were thatched cottages and old pieces of handsome architecture in insignificant buildings. The church was altogether too large and too magnificent to be supported by so small a place, and as I looked up at its tower all things modern were swept from my mind, and involuntarily a twelfth-century impression stole upon me. I seemed to be in an entirely different era, an age thick with the influence of the church and its culture. No sooner had I passed through this village, than, curiously

enough, I entered a second as ancient and unfamiliar. A large farm-waggon trundled across the wide street. It rolled over some rough ground in a careless, handsome sort of way; its four wheels were thick and set at a strange angle; its woodwork was massive, and its tail-board painted with pretty flowers and scrolls in the manner of peasant art. The cottages were thatched and built of a small red brick that was soft and rounded with age. A handsome old farm spread itself out luxuriously, its barns and outbuildings exhibiting herculean beams.

I paused in the village street to consider my surroundings, and there came upon me the conviction that the long-desired adventure was imminent. I pulled out my map, and, blushing at its modernity, found that I had passed through West Lyng and was at that moment standing in East Lyng, but I could have sworn, as I wandered past the low cottages, that either I was dreaming or that I had walked out of the twentieth century into remoter times. Even the atmosphere seemed clearer, and I cannot remember seeing a single advertisement for motor spirit on the village walls.

No sooner was I clear of the villages than I found that the hilly, wooded county of Somerset had disappeared, and that I was suddenly walking in a foreign land, an entirely flat country without hedges or stone walls; a watery, peaty plain divisioned up by ditches and rows of willow trees. It was obviously one of those tracts of land which had been at one time the bottom of a lake or sea. The fields were as flat as billiard tables; the dividing ditches were straight, the rows of willows were straight, and the road was straight, and being very level I was able at all events to travel

quickly, going forward expectantly into this change of scene. It was practically certain now that somewhere ahead an adventure was awaiting " The Peep Show."

Here in a field stood a monument in commemoration of King Alfred, who had hidden in the forest which had existed there. In other fields there had once stood a monastery built by him, and suddenly, away over the flat country, between the willows I saw a strange sugar-loaf hill, a complete, green cone, with a grey church perched on its summit. A little later and I passed a few poor cottages, where shy people sat in the low doorways weaving osier baskets as the people wove baskets in and before Alfred's time.

Consulting the map again, my one link with modern times, I read the names of King's Sedgemoor and the Isle of Athelney. I was no longer in Somersetshire; I was certainly in the land of history books. The spirit of the past stirred me strangely, and I began to feel that abbots, and monks, armoured barons on horseback and long-haired kings were really in existence and might appear at any moment.

In the afternoon I came to another sugar-loaf hill, with another early English church on its summit. The road went about this hill, and as I followed it round I nearly twisted my neck in the effort to keep my eyes on this fascinating monument. This was a hill to look at. This was a hill and a church with a history. Why! one could paint a picture, or compose a poem, or make a picture post card, or preach a lecture as dull as ditch-water on such a hill as that. At all events I resolved to study the matter the next time I came within reach of books.

The strange plain came to an end, and I wandered up and down hills again. The country was spacious and lonely and the villages too small to think of performing in them. The old houses and the wide roadway at Street confirmed the feeling that I was travelling deeper and deeper into the past, and I felt myself to be quite a mediæval figure, a shower of poppets and moppets, of motions and miracle plays as I walked into the streets of Glastonbury—the ancient Isle of Avalon.

Who shall say that a spirit did not lead me on! Something carried me through the town, past the Priory, the Abbots' Kitchen, the Old Pilgrim's Inn, and the High Street into Chilkwell Street, out to that strange high hill, The Tor, yet another sugar-loaf crowned with another ancient church. Standing at the foot of this sacred hill is a large, grey stone building, not all of which is ancient, but which for all that is strong, and high, and mighty like a castle with its many windows looking down into a paved courtyard where silver fountains tinkle. "The Peep Show," feeling quite small and frivolous, pulled through the big gates into this courtyard, and at once, miraculously, found itself being welcomed sympathetically by the Lady of the Castle.

Here were no questions as to business and no dogmatic advice to buy a motor-car. Here were no fiddling questions about rents and permissions to perform. We were welcomed as strolling Bards, as Troubadours; we were an entertainment and here in the Castle were guests to be entertained. We were accepted naturally in ragged coat and dusty shoes, for it was seen at once

that we were knights sworn to hard living, to simplicity and poverty.

We were fed, and in less time than it takes in the telling, this weather-beaten, unkempt showman, trying to hide his rough shoes and hob-nails under the chair, found himself in one of the Castle rooms, seated on tapestries, surrounded by a gay and courtly gathering of knights and ladies, listening the while to a learned discourse, the which rang with the names of King Arthur, of Sir Galahad, and of the Romance of the Grail. As I am a true knight, my brain began to reel, and I was for rushing out into the town to see if the twentieth century still existed, if one could still buy Gold Flake cigarettes in the shops.

But from the Castle we wandered in a body to the grounds, where we looked into the deeps of the Chalice Well, the old Blood Well, to whose healing waters pilgrims had flocked for countless years, and which, it is said, sprang from the Holy Grail itself. Now we were looking into ancient stone baths, or drinking the sacred water as it gushed from golden rocks, or wandering over the hillside where the originators of Glastonbury, the monks of Joseph of Arimathæa, had lived as hermits in huts. The past rose up on all sides like an enchanted thicket and held us all in thrall within those Castle walls.

Anon, the Lady of the Castle moved to the Banqueting Hall and let cry a great feast, and well ye may wit that there was all manner of meate plenteously and right good cheer. To the long tables of this feast came pilgrims from all the world over. Unto this feast came Knights from the North and the South, and there were

fair damosels from America and elsewhere in plenty. Also there came unto this feast a learned Knight from Switzerland, and another from the University of Liverpool, and he was a young man. And I'll warrant you that shabby Knight the Peep-showman was there jostling his jostle at the board among all the ladies fair.

In time the tables were cleared and removed, and the said showman did set up his little blue theatre in that great Hall where the rafters lost themselves in dim shadows. The guests took their seats and in proper courtly style the staffs from the kitchens, the bedchamber, and office were called in. The Lady of the Castle introduced " The Peep Show " ; a hush came down on the audience and as they looked at me expectantly I knew that the great test had come ; I trembled and my five wits deserted me.

Here I was suddenly confronted with an audience of Highbrows. The Lady of the Castle was herself a poetess and famous dramatist. Here were skilled artists and craftsmen, professors of literature, learned doctors and philosophers. I had become accustomed to children and village audiences, but before this array of intellect, before these sophisticated critics habituated to careful compositions, I quailed for my little puppets. This audience would expect something literary; they would demand old miracle plays, or something from the Greek, or a play composed by someone with a foreign name, or a folk-play from the Chinese, certainly something Italian. And all I had to offer was fat old Martha, much the worse for wear, falling out of her window, and, with the help of some squeaky music, dancing with John Barleycorn; this would be followed

by a Boxing Match, a patently childish scene with a Magic Chest, and a Ghost Play, which, it is true, was to be some day performed in graceful verse, but which at present pursued its course in very colloquial prose.

I turned from hot to cold. I repented fervently of all those valuable moments which I had wasted on the road. Why had I spent so much time in reading newspapers! Why had I cooked myself such luxurious repasts of *minestra di magra* when bread and cheese would have sufficed. Why! O why! had I not written out carefully at least one puppet play! I shivered and shook and desperately tried to invent a play on the spot appropriate to this learned audience.

But, in the midst of all this confusion, there was a sudden burst of applause. The audience were clapping their hands and looking at me, whereupon I realised that I must have made an introductory speech. Consumed with blushes and prickling with embarrassment I dived into the curtains, pulled off my coat and plunged into my village entertainment.

I cannot say whether it originated with the philosophers, the professors, the artists, or the more easygoing staff, but the first appearance of the puppets was greeted with a spontaneous laugh. At the end of the first scene there was no doubt that they all joined together to applaud, and I hope it was not too cynical of me if I laughed a little to hear this intelligentsia applauding the same simple scene which had amused so many children and villagers. Personally, I thought the more of them. These clever people were human then after all and sith it liketh the company well the puppets waxed merry and did perform in all manner of

antic. And by my faith these distinguished Knights and their clever Ladies laughed right well the which was a great relief to the nervous showman who likewise was relieved to find that a collection was in accordance with these early English modes and that every each contributed him his dole.

For three days I rested within those Castle walls. And not all the time was spent in junketing, for I made a large poster of " The Peep Show," announcing a performance to take place in the open-air theatre of Chalice Well on the Saturday. This poster was fixed to the truck, and, inspired no doubt by the courageous example of the knights of old, I wheeled it round the streets of Glastonbury and Street, ringing the while a beautifully decorated Florentine bell. We enjoyed this performance in the orchard theatre, the audience seated on a grassy amphitheatre, the bright apples around us and the blue heavens above.

I scorned the comfortable bed which the hospitable Lady of the Castle kindly offered and I camped on a lawn which would have served admirably for croquet or for bowls but was far too level to accommodate the awkward shape of the reclining human body. So, for the greater part of the nights, I lay listening to the fountains, or I walked the paths of the Castle garden, hoping for an encounter with those old hermits or perhaps Sir Galahad himself.

Those three days of merrymaking came to an end and with them I concluded that my first Punch and Judy tour had come to an end too ; at the last moment I had happened into the proper culminating adventure; these days at the Castle of Chalice Well had set a crown upon

the journey. " The Peep Show " had been thoroughly tested and I knew now that a simple puppet-show could, in these clever, modern times, amuse the three races of mankind, the vulgar poor race, the vulgar rich, and that other race which is not concerned with riches, poverty, or vulgarity, the Intelligentsia—the highbrows.

And another satisfactory thing was that I walked out of Glastonbury with three pounds and one penny, this amount being collected at the two performances within the hospitable walls of this enchanted and enchanting Castle of Glastonbury.

XXIV

STADDONS—ACROSS THE MENDIPS—PROFESSOR HILL'S NOBBER—SHOW IN BATH—OVER THE COTSWOLDS—THE END

I DREW out of Glastonbury, shook off this nonsense about the olden times, and set out to reach that destination in the Cotswolds as soon as I could. On this very modern road to Wells I was passed by a great many motor-cars which filled the air with petrol and covered me with dust, and so established my existence in the twentieth century as a real and horrid fact.

And yet the olden times pulled me back again in Wells. Here is such a collection of antique monuments, of Cloisters, of Moats and Barns, of Chapter House, Undercroft, Chain Gate, and Vicar's Close, that my brain reeled and reeled again, especially when a mechanic with a bag of tools on his back walked up to my side and said:

"Are you staddons?"

I looked sufficiently bewildered for him to repeat his question in another form.

"Is that staddons?"

I found sufficient breath to say, "Eh?"

"I say, is it staddons?" he repeated loudly.

If he thought I was deaf I certainly thought he was

mad. There was no sense at all in such a word as " staddons," and I was going to say so when he said:

" Are you my brother ? Are you my brother's butler ? "

Yes, he was certainly mad, and I began to wonder how I should answer two such crazy questions. He must know that I am not his brother, I thought, and I don't believe the brother of a working mechanic in dungarees can possibly possess a butler. He is mad. I must get away or else humour him gently.

We came to a cart standing in the gutter and passed it on opposite sides, he on the path and I in the road. I hid behind the cart and hung back in the hopes that he would forget me and that something else would attract his mad attention. But he waited for me to come round the cart. He even stepped off the pavement and looked round the vehicle to see what was stopping me and if he could help. There was no escape and we went along together.

" What's your name ? " he said. " I thought you was my brother's butler. He's got a show down at Weston and sometimes he comes in here with it. My name is Staddon. I belong to the Oldest Punch and Judy family in England, you know."

Here his companion pulled his sleeve and began to talk business. It was evident that in talking to me they were being carried away from their work.

" 'Arf a mo', Fred," said Mr. Staddon. " Seeing the sticks I thought he might be my brother, you know. That is a Punch and Judy, ain't it ? "

I was all for the " 'arf a mo'." This sounded promising and I explained " The Peep Show " to him.

" Ah ! Where are your swotchels ? "

By " swotchel," for that is what I made of the word after several repetitions, he referred to the puppets. So I opened the box and pulled some of them out to show him. His companion became very alarmed at this delay, but Mr. Staddon and I were much too interested in one another to bother about him. Why ! Here was a miraculous meeting of the oldest Punch and Judy with the newest.

" Ain't yer got a nobber ? " he asked.

I was sufficiently educated to know that this meant a collector, and I confessed that I was alone. But I suggested that he should do a show with me in Wells that evening, and if he would I offered to split the collection " fifty-fifty."

Unfortunately it was impossible. He was only in the town for a job and had to catch a train by seven o'clock. He would have liked nothing better. He did a show sometimes himself.

" Yes," he went on, " all our family are in it. I got a brother at Weston and one at Bournemouth, and my uncle does it in Woking and 'e's nearly eighty years old. My father used to do it, and my grandfather and his father before him. Some of our figures are over a hundred years old. You can't get the figures made nowadays; we make our own—cut them out of deal. But the old ones are made of ash, and when you've got them up, my word ! you know they're up ! We don't use 'em—much too heavy."

By this time the companion had lost all patience and literally dragged the amiable and smiling Mr. Staddon away from me down a side-street. But as he went, he

walked backwards shouting out directions as to where I could get a good tea cheap. " Not one of them places where you get two bits of thin bread and butter and they charge you one and nine," he shouted, and then disappeared.

I followed his directions faithfully and was served with surprisingly large cups of tea and generous slabs of bread and—well, it would not be true to say butter. It was cheap enough and nasty enough, but I felt in honour bound to pay this tribute at the very least to this friendly member of the oldest Punch and Judy family.

Not being able to perform with the help of Mr. Staddon I had no heart for showing at all in Wells. Having come into touch with ancient puppet men I could not be expected to waste time over cathedrals or antique battlements and I pulled straight through the town, past the hoary old shops and the old-fashioned houses which fitted well with my pedestrian mood. But the most surprising manifestation of a past age which crossed my path was a schoolboy, or, rather, the boy's clothes, which were brown velvet, a red tie, and bright purple stockings finished off with neat black shoes. Surely such a costume could be no accident but the result, a lingering memory of those times when males were really cock birds and dressed themselves richly and gaily.

Two miles out of the town, on the heights of the Mendips, I pitched camp amongst green bracken, under oak and ash trees, with an immense view over the county to the sea, with the Tor Hill of Glastonbury still in sight, standing out strangely prominent against the plain.

All next day I travelled over the Mendips without any more adventures than to see lovely views of valleys and plains, and hill-tops covered with the purple and gold of heather and gorse. And in the evening I found another good camp and a friendly farmer who took me into his romantic old kitchen, introduced me to his family, and treated me to new milk.

On the Wednesday afternoon I came into Bath. And as I walked through the streets to the centre of the town I was dimly conscious of being followed by someone, of being stared at rather persistently by a small, dark man. I put my belongings into the yard of the New Inn and as I came out of the gates this man was standing there, his black, beady eyes fixed upon me. He soon introduced himself. He was not another member of another oldest Punch and Judy family, but he was of interest, for he introduced himself as old Professor Hill's nobber; he knew all the pitches in Bath and did I want help with the show. He guided me to the post office and then I took him to tea, for I wanted to hear about Professor Hill, now dead, who had been the great Punch and Judy man of Bath.

In the tea-shop my new friend became reminiscent and sentimental, but not about Punch and Judy shows. I had a job to keep him to the subject, for it seems that he and his wife had taken tea in this very shop every Saturday night for years. And now—his wife had run away with his illusions. By his illusions I soon discovered that he did not mean those abstract visions of what a perfect wife ought to be, but some very real material illusions, to wit, his stock-in-trade as an illusionist—a conjurer. His recollections made his nose

run, and he sniffed dangerously. I chewed my Bath bun as sympathetically as possible. Then he had been deserted by a pal. He had " worked " Harris, The Handcuff King. He had " worked " him well, on the best pitches, and had been the making of him. Then " The Handcuff King " began to get evening dress engagements on the halls, and my friend " never saw him no more."

But in good time I was favoured with some biographical details of Professor Hill, and the painful truth is he used to " booze."

" When we was down at Torquay and Paignton we used to do three shows a day, and he was always drunk at the last show. He made a lot of money. We used to take from three to five pounds a day at Paignton. But he was real clever at it—he used to rehearse in his room at home. He got as much as twelve pound for a show once. Of course his ' flashes ' were printed in gold, all lovely you know. His tilt was red and white, and his curtains was velvet with tassels, and we used to paint the figures every week with water-colour and gold size. He was going to learn me Punch, but I said ' O no ! none of that for me ! Too 'ard work ! ' When you get the blooming Punch up 'e seems to weigh pounds. Do you know 'ow 'e used to make his squeakers ? Why, he used to get two shillings, beat them out thin, and then cut them to fit the mouth. Beautiful squeakers they was. But he messed about and drank too much. The business went down and none of his family didn't carry on with it."

This was the sort of inside knowledge I thirsted for, and here and there I caught a grain of interesting

technical information. He descanted upon methods of " working " the show, and incidentally he let fall some direct evidence of the moral tide which is setting in against the Punch and Judy drama.

" Now what you want to do," said he, " when you come to a village, is to go to the parson and get him to give you a quid for doing a show to the school kids. But if you do a show like that for the parson mind you leave out the bit about chucking the baby out of the window. They don't like it, especially the catholic parsons, and they say it ain't right to show the children a thing like that. And quite right, too, because some of them kids you see might go 'ome and start practising on the real baby! "

I exhausted my powers of drawing out this " nobber," and as our conversation came to a standstill we each went about our business, but first agreeing to meet again at six o'clock to unite our efforts in a performance.

At that hour we were both at the New Inn and under his direction we trudged down to the Quay and set up the theatre. He made me very nervous with his admiration of my Bath-chair wheels. He had been looking for just such a pair himself, but in all Bath there were no Bath-chair wheels to be found. He toyed with my wheels ; he spun them round, he patted them, he looked at them longingly; he was dark, he was brown like a gipsy, and I began to wonder what would become of this adventure with a professional " nobber." It would be bad enough if this stranger disappeared with the collection, but if he carried off my desirable wheels whilst I was performing I would be in a serious predicament. So I carried through that show under

difficulties. If I was not looking for him in the front, I was looking out at the back of the theatre to see if the wheels were still there. But he must have had honourable and comradely intentions towards me, for in about half an hour he put his head through the back curtains and said: " Don't work too 'ard. We ain't getting much—only sevenpence 'ap'ny."

Of course I was mean enough to suspect him of " nobbing " on his own account, and after doing another scene, I got him to continue the performance while I collected. " Ah, that's it," he said, " perhaps they'll pay up if they see the workman." He was quite ready to perform. That did not seem to present any difficulty to him, and I was amused to watch his first efforts with the puppets while I went round with the bag. His two puppets simply dashed about the theatre in a wild, chaotic manner, carrying on a vehement conversation which seemed to be angry in character, but the words, if there were any, were quite unintelligible. I thought the sixpence which I collected was as much as this scene was worth. I performed again and he collected again, and we finished up with only two shillings, he being very diffident about taking his half of the proceeds.

Financially this passage through Bath was nothing to speak of. I had not seen the Abbey, or the Roman Baths, or sat, drinking the waters, in the Pump Room. I had not done that which I ought to have done in Bath, but yet, what other person in the world, on his first visit to that town, has been so privileged as to spend a few hours with Professor Hill's " nobber," the man who could find no Bath-chair wheels in Bath! I

was indeed fortunate—I did not think that Bath had so much to offer.

It was nearly dark by the time I had packed up and shaken hands with my friend. He left me his name and address written on a scrap of card all mixed up with the names of racehorses and mysterious hieroglyphics. He fixed a mesmeric stare upon me with his piercing black eyes and said that had he not started on another business he would have come along with me. "I would have stuck to you," he said; "you wouldn't have got rid of me." He confessed that he was a gipsy; that he had been brought up in tents and that he liked nothing better.

It was quite dark before I got out of Bath. I had no lamp on my truck and I walked in fear of the police. Dark as it was Bath never looked more lovely; it was a blue, fairy mist twinkling with golden lights, its elegant spires and chimney stacks, its roofs and telegraph poles silhouetted against the dark downs and a glowing night sky.

But it was dark and it grew darker. I was longing to pitch my tent, but the villadom of Bath seemed to extend for miles. I pulled up hills and round corners and halted once to explore the ground, round a half-built house, for a camp. I fell over boards and bricks, and stepped into the mortar, but could not find a level space. After pulling up a stiff hill I seemed to come into the country proper, and at last reached a real meadow gate, and a large haystack looming over the hedge. I was not long in getting inside this meadow, in burying myself comfortably in the hay, and in falling asleep, somewhere high above the twinkling lights of Bath.

This was the last adventure. All next day I pulled over the lonely Cotswold Hills, travelling about twenty miles, and singing songs in praise of camping and tramping and the stirring life we jolly showmen lead. I spent another day in getting to Stroud and that night a September frost stiffened the little tent, chilling me in the early hours.

The next morning found us all back at the starting-point all in good going order. The tent was torn, the elegant tent-poles broken and replaced by hazel sticks, the curtains of the show faded and the paint scratched, but the showman in a sufficiently vigorous state of health to remedy those superficial ailments. There was a credit balance of five pounds; a wealth of experience had been gained; three new puppets, various properties, some press notices, innumerable gags and a complete new play had been added to the show. And in the knapsack were half a brown loaf, some tomatoes, a piece of cheese, a packet of tea, and a quarter of a pound of butter—all good commodities.

THE END